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DANTE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

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BY

R. W. CHURCH

SOMETIME DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S

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DANTE[1]

[JAN. 1850]

THE *Divina Commedia* is one of the landmarks of history. More than a magnificent poem, more than the beginning of a language and the opening of a national literature, more than the inspirer of art, and

[1] *Dante's Divine Comedy, the Inferno; a literal Prose Translation, with the Text of the Original.* By J. A. CARLYLE, M.D., London: 1849. I have never quite forgiven myself for not *having said* more of the unpretending but honest and most useful volume which stood at the head of this essay when it first appeared as an article. It was placed there, according to what was then a custom of article writers, as a peg to hang remarks upon which might or might not be criticisms of the particular book so noticed. It did not offer itself specially to my use, and my attention was busy with my own work. But this was no excuse for availing myself of a good book, and not giving it the notice which it deserved. To an English student beginning Dante, and wishing to study him in a scholarly manner, it is really more useful than a verse translation can be; and I have always greatly regretted that the plan of translating the whole work was dropped for want of the appreciation which the first instalment ought to have had. (1878.)

the glory of a great people, it is one of those rare and solemn monuments of the mind's power, which measure and test what it can reach to, which rise up ineffaceably and for ever as time goes on, marking out its advance by grander divisions than its centuries, and adopted as epochs by the consent of all who come after. It stands with the *Iliad* and Shakespeare's Plays, with the writings of Aristotle and Plato, with the *Novum Organon* and the *Principia*, with Justinian's *Code*, with the Parthenon and St. Peter's. It is the first Christian poem; and it opens European literature, as the *Iliad* did that of Greece and Rome. And, like the *Iliad*, it has never become out of date; it accompanies in undiminished freshness the literature which it began.

We approach the history of such works, in which genius seems to have pushed its achievements to a new limit, with a kind of awe. The beginnings of all things, their bursting out from nothing, and gradual evolution into substance and shape, cast on the mind a solemn influence. They come too near the fount of being to be followed up without our feeling the shadows which surround it. We cannot but fear, cannot but feel ourselves cut off from this visible and familiar world—as we enter into the cloud. And as with the processes of nature, so it is with those offsprings of man's mind, by which he has added per-

m[illegible]nently one more great feature to the world, and cr[illegible]eated a new power which is to act on mankind to th[illegible]e end. The mystery of the inventive and creative fa[illegible]culty, the subtle and incalculable combinations by w[illegible]hich it was led to its work, and carried through it, a[illegible]re out of the reach of investigating thought. Often t[illegible]he idea recurs of the precariousness of the result; h[illegible]y how little the world might have lost one of its [illegible]rnaments—by one sharp pang, or one chance meeting, or any other among the countless accidents among which man runs his course. And then the solemn recollection supervenes, that powers were formed, and life preserved, and circumstances arranged, and actions controlled, that thus it should be: and the work which man has brooded over, and at last created, is the foster-child too of that "Wisdom [illegible]h reaches from end to end, strongly and sweetly [illegible]sing all things."

[illegible]t does not abate these feelings that we can follow in [illegible]me cases and to a certain extent, the progress of a w[illegible]rk. Indeed, the sight of the particular accidents a[illegible]ng which it was developed—which belong perhaps to a heterogeneous and widely discordant order of things, which are out of proportion and out of harmony with it, which do not explain it, which have, as it may seem to us, no natural right to be connected with it, to bear on its character, or contribute to its

accomplishment, to which we feel, as it were, ashamed to owe what we can least spare, yet on which its forming mind and purpose were dependent, and with which they had to conspire—affects the imagination even more than cases where we see nothing. We are tempted less to musing and wonder by the *Iliad*, a work without a history, cut off from its past, the sole relic and vestige of its age, unexplained in its origin and perfection, than by the *Divina Commedia*, destined for the highest ends and most universal sympathy, yet the reflection of a personal history, and issuing seemingly from its chance incidents.

The *Divina Commedia* is singular among the great works with which it ranks, for its strong stamp of personal character and history. In general we associate little more than the name—not the life—of a great poet with his works; personal interest belongs more usually to greatness in its active than its reflective forms. But the whole idea and purpose of the *Commedia*, as well as its filling up and colouring, were determined by Dante's peculiar history. The loftiest, perhaps, in its aim and flight of all poems, it is also the most individual; the writer's own life is chronicled in it, as well as the issues and upshot of all things. It is at once the mirror to all time of the sins and perfections of men, of the judgments and grace of God, and the record, often the only one, of the trans-

ient names, and local factions, and obscure ambitions, and forgotten crimes, of the poet's own day; and in that awful company to which he leads us, in the most unearthly of his scenes, we never lose sight of himself. And when this peculiarity sends us to history, it seems as if the poem which was to hold such a place in Christian literature hung upon and grew out of chance events, rather than the deliberate design of its author. History indeed here, as generally, is but a feeble exponent of the course of growth in a great mind and great ideas. It shows us early a bent and purpose—the man conscious of power and intending to use it—and then the accidents among which he worked: but how that current of purpose threaded its way among them, how it was thrown back, deflected, deepened, by them, we cannot learn from history. It presents but a broken and mysterious picture. A boy of quick and enthusiastic temper grows up into youth in a dream of love. The lady of his mystic passion dies early. He dreams of her still, not as a wonder of earth, but as a Saint in Paradise, and relieves his heart in an autobiography, a strange and perplexing work of fiction—quaint and subtle enough for a metaphysical conceit; but, on the other hand, with far too much of genuine and deep feeling. It is a first essay; he closes it abruptly as if dissatisfied with his work, but with the resolution

of raising at a future day a worthy monument to the memory of her whom he has lost. It is the promise and purpose of a great work. But a prosaic change seems to come over this half-ideal character. The lover becomes the student—the student of the thirteenth century—struggling painfully against difficulties, eager and hot after knowledge, wasting eyesight and stinting sleep, subtle, inquisitive, active-minded and sanguine, but omnivorous, overflowing with dialectical forms, loose in premiss and ostentatiously rigid in syllogism, fettered by the refinements of half-awakened taste, and the mannerisms of the Provençals. Boethius and Cicero, and the mass of mixed learning within his reach, are accepted as the consolation of his human griefs; he is filled with the passion of universal knowledge, and the desire to communicate it. Philosophy has become the lady of his soul—to write allegorical poems in her honour, and to comment on them with all the apparatus of his learning in prose, his mode of celebrating her. Further, he marries; it is said, not happily. The antiquaries, too, have disturbed romance by discovering that Beatrice also was married some years before her death. He appears, as time goes on, as a burgher of Florence, the father of a family, a politician, an envoy, a magistrate, a partisan, taking his full share in the quarrels of the day. At length we see him,

at once an exile, and the poet of the *Commedia*. Beatrice reappears—shadowy, melting at times into symbol and figure—but far too living and real, addressed with too intense and natural feeling, to be the mere personification of anything. The lady of the philosophical Canzoni has vanished. The student's dream has been broken, as the boy's had been; and the earnestness of the man, enlightened by sorrow, overleaping the student's formalities and abstractions, reverted in sympathy to the earnestness of the boy, and brooded once more on that Saint in Paradise, whose presence and memory had once been so soothing, and who now seemed a real link between him and that stable country, "where the angels are in peace." Round her image, the reflection of purity, and truth, and forbearing love, was grouped that confused scene of trouble and effort, of failure and success, which the poet saw round him; round her image it arranged itself in awful order—and that image, not a metaphysical abstraction, but the living memory, freshened by sorrow, and seen through the softening and hallowing vista of years, of Beatrice Portinari—no figment of imagination, but God's creature and servant. A childish love, dissipated by study and business, and revived in memory by heavy sorrow—a boyish resolution, made in a moment of feeling, interrupted, though it would be hazardous to

say in Dante's case, laid aside, for apparently more manly studies, gave the idea and suggested the form of the "Sacred poem of earth and heaven."

And the occasion of this startling unfolding of the poetic gift, of this passage of a soft and dreamy boy, into the keenest, boldest, sternest of poets, the free and mighty leader of European song, was, what is not ordinarily held to be a source of poetical inspiration,—the political life. The boy had sensibility, high aspirations, and a versatile and passionate nature; the student added to this energy, various learning, gifts of language, and noble ideas on the capacities and ends of man. But it was the factions of Florence which made Dante a great poet. But for them, he might have been a modern critic and essayist born before his time, and have held a high place among the writers of fugitive verses; in Italy, a graceful but trifling and idle tribe, often casting a deep and beautiful thought into a mould of expressive diction, but oftener toying with a foolish and glittering conceit, and whose languid genius was exhausted by a sonnet. He might have thrown into the shade the Guidos and Cinos of his day, to be eclipsed by Petrarch. But he learned in the bitter feuds of Italy not to trifle; they opened to his view, and he had an eye to see, the true springs and abysses of this mortal life,—motives and passions stronger than lovers'

sentiments, evils beyond the consolations of Boethius and Cicero; and from that fiery trial which without searing his heart, annealed his strength and purpose, he drew that great gift and power by which he stands pre-eminent even among his high compeers, the gift of being real. And the idea of the *Commedia* took shape, and expanded into its endless forms of terror and beauty, not under the roof-tree of the literary citizen, but when the exile had been driven out to the highways of the world, to study nature on the sea or by the river or on the mountain track, and to study men in the courts of Verona and Ravenna, and in the schools of Bologna and Paris—perhaps of Oxford.

The connexion of these feuds with Dante's poem has given to the middle age history of Italy an interest of which it is not undeserving in itself, full as it is of curious exhibitions of character and contrivance, but to which politically it cannot lay claim, amid the social phenomena, so far grander in scale and purpose and more felicitous in issue, of the other western nations. It is remarkable for keeping up an antique phase, which, in spite of modern arrangements, it has not yet lost. It is a history of cities. In ancient history all that is most memorable and instructive gathers round cities; civilisation and empire were concentrated within walls; and it baffled the ancient

mind to conceive how power should be possessed and wielded, by numbers larger than might be collected in a single market-place. The Roman Empire indeed aimed at being one in its administration and law; but it was not a nation, nor were its provinces nations. Yet everywhere but in Italy it prepared them for becoming nations. And while everywhere else parts were uniting and union was becoming organisation—and neither geographical remoteness, nor unwieldiness of numbers, nor local interests and differences, were untractable obstacles to that spirit of fusion which was at once the ambition of the few and the instinct of the many; and cities, even where most powerful, had become the centres of the attracting and joining forces, knots in the political network—while this was going on more or less happily throughout the rest of Europe, in Italy the ancient classic idea lingered in its simplicity, its narrowness and jealousy, wherever there was any political activity. The history of Southern Italy indeed is mainly a foreign one, the history of modern Rome merges in that of the Papacy; but Northern Italy has a history of its own, and that is a history of separate and independent cities—points of reciprocal and indestructible repulsion, and within, theatres of action where the blind tendencies and traditions of classes and parties weighed little on the freedom of individual character, and citizens could

watch and measure and study one another with the minuteness of private life.

Two cities were the centres of ancient history in its most interesting time. And two cities of modern Italy represent, with entirely undesigned but curiously exact coincidence, the parts of Athens and Rome. Venice, superficially so unlike, is yet in many of its accidental features, and still more in its spirit, the counterpart of Rome, in its obscure and mixed origin, in its steady growth, in its quick sense of order and early settlement of its polity, in its grand and serious public spirit, in its subordination of the individual to the family, and the family to the state, in its combination of remote dominion with the liberty of a solitary and sovereign city. And though the associations and the scale of the two were so different—though Rome had its hills and its legions, and Venice its lagunes and galleys—the long empire of Venice, the heir of Carthage and predecessor of England on the seas, the great aristocratic republic of a thousand years, is the only empire that has yet matched Rome in length and steadiness of tenure. Brennus and Hannibal were not resisted with greater constancy than Doria and Louis XII.; and that great aristocracy, long so proud, so high-spirited, so intelligent, so practical, who combined the enterprise and wealth of merchants, the self-devotion of soldiers and gravity of senators, with the

uniformity and obedience of a religious order, may compare without shame its Giustiniani, and Zenos, and Morosini, with Roman Fabii and Claudii. And Rome could not be more contrasted with Athens than Venice with Italian and contemporary Florence—stability with fitfulness, independence impregnable and secure, with a short-lived and troubled liberty, empire meditated and achieved, with a course of barren intrigues and quarrels. Florence, gay, capricious, turbulent, the city of party, the head and busy patroness of democracy in the cities round her—Florence, where popular government was inaugurated with its utmost exclusiveness and most pompous ceremonial; waging her little summer wars against Ghibelline tyrants, revolted democracies, and her own exiles; and further, so rich in intellectual gifts, in variety of individual character, in poets, artists, wits, historians—Florence in its brilliant days recalled the image of ancient Athens, and did not depart from its prototype in the beauty of its natural site, in its noble public buildings, in the size and nature of its territory. And the course of its history is similar and the result of similar causes—a traditional spirit of freedom, with its accesses of fitful energy, its periods of grand display and moments of glorious achievement, but producing nothing politically great or durable, and sinking at length into a resigned servitude. It had

its Peisistratidæ more successful than those of Athens; it had, too, its Harmodius and Aristogeiton; it had its great orator of liberty, as potent and as unfortunate as the antagonist of Philip. And finally, like Athens, it became content with the remembrance of its former glory, with being the fashionable and acknowledged seat of refinement and taste, with being a favoured dependency on the modern heir of the Cæsars. But if to Venice belongs a grander public history, Florentine names and works, like Athenian, will be living among men, when the Brenta shall have been left unchecked to turn the lagunes into ploughland, and when Rome herself may no longer be the seat of the popes.

The year of Dante's birth was a memorable one in the annals of Florence, of Italy, and of Christendom.[1] The year 1265 was the year of that great victory of Benevento, where Charles of Anjou overthrew Manfred of Naples, and destroyed at one blow the power of the house of Swabia. From that time till the time of Charles V., the emperors had no footing in Italy. Further, that victory set up the French influence in Italy, which, transient in itself, produced such strange and momentous consequences, by the intimate connexion to which it led between

[1] May 1265. (Pelli.) *Battle of Benevento:* Feb. 26, 126⅝. The Florentine year began March 25.

the French kings and the popes. The protection of France was dearly bought by the captivity of Avignon, the great western schism, and the consequent secularisation of the Papacy, which lasted on uninterrupted till the Council of Trent. Nearly three centuries of degradation and scandal, unrelieved by one heroic effort among the successors of Gregory VII., connected the Reformation with the triumph of Charles and the Pope at Benevento. Finally, by it the Guelf party was restored for good in Florence; the Guelf democracy, which had been trampled down by the Uberti and Manfred's chivalry at Monteaperti, once more raised its head; and fortune, which had long wavered between the rival lilies, finally turned against the white one, till the name of Ghibelline became a proscribed one in Florence, as Jacobite was once in Scotland, or Papist in England, or Royalist in France.

The names of Guelf and Ghibelline were the inheritance of a contest which, in its original meaning, had been long over. The old struggle between the priesthood and the empire was still kept up traditionally, but its ideas and interests were changed: they were still great and important ones, but not those of Gregory VII. It had passed over from the mixed region of the spiritual and temporal into the purely political. The cause of the popes was that of the independence of Italy—the freedom and alliance

of the great cities of the north, and the dependence of the centre and south on the Roman See. To keep the Emperor out of Italy—to create a barrier of powerful cities against him south of the Alps—to form behind themselves a compact territory, rich, removed from the first burst of invasion, and maintaining a strong body of interested feudatories, had now become the great object of the popes. It may have been a wise policy on their part, for the maintenance of their spiritual influence, to attempt to connect their own independence with the political freedom of the Italian communities; but certain it is that the ideas and the characters which gave a religious interest and grandeur to the earlier part of the contest, appear but sparingly, if at all, in its later forms.

The two parties did not care to keep in view principles which their chiefs had lost sight of. The Emperor and the Pope were both real powers, able to protect and assist; and they divided between them those who required protection and assistance. Geographical position, the rivalry of neighbourhood, family tradition, private feuds, and above all private interest, were the main causes which assigned cities, families, and individuals to the Ghibelline or Guelf party. One party called themselves the Emperor's liegemen, and their watchward was authority and

law; the other side were the liegemen of Holy Church, and their cry was liberty; and the distinction as a broad one is true. But a democracy would become Ghibelline, without scruple, if its neighbour town was Guelf; and among the Guelf liegemen of the Church and liberty, the pride of blood and love of power were not a whit inferior to that of their opponents. Yet, though the original principle of the contest was lost, and the political distinctions of parties were often interfered with by interest or accident, it is not impossible to trace in the two factions differences of temper, of moral and political inclinations, which though visible only on a large scale and in the mass, were quite sufficient to give meaning and reality to their mutual opposition. These differences had come down, greatly altered of course, from the quarrel in which the parties took their rise. The Ghibellines as a body reflected the worldliness, the licence, the irreligion, the reckless selfishness, the daring insolence, and at the same time the gaiety and pomp, the princely magnificence and generosity and largeness of mind of the house of Swabia; they were the men of the court and camp, imperious and haughty from ancient lineage or the Imperial cause, yet not wanting in the frankness and courtesy of nobility; careless of public opinion and public rights, but not dead to the grandeur of public

objects and public services. Among them were found, or to them inclined, all who, whether from a base or a lofty ambition, desired to place their will above law[1]—the lord of the feudal castle, the robber-knight of the Apennine pass, the magnificent but terrible tyrants of the cities, the pride and shame of Italy, the Visconti and Scaligers. That renowned Ghibelline chief, whom the poet finds in the fiery sepulchres of the unbelievers with the great Ghibelline emperor and the princely Ghibelline cardinal—the disdainful and bitter but lofty spirit of Farinata degli Uberti, the conqueror, and then singly and at his own risk, the saviour of his country which had wronged him, represents the good as well as the bad side of his party.

The Guelfs, on the other hand, were the party of the middle classes; they rose out of and held to the people; they were strong by their compactness, their organisation in cities, their commercial relations and interests, their command of money. Further, they

[1] "Maghinardo da Susinana (*il Demonio*, Purg. 14) fu uno grande e savio tiranno . . . gran castellano, e con molti fedeli: savio fu di guerra e bene avventuroso in piu battaglie, e al suo tempo fece gran cose. Ghibellino era di sua nazione e in sue opere; ma co' Fiorentini era Guelfo e nimico di tutti i loro nimici, o Guelfi o Ghibellini che fossono."—G. Vill. vii. 149. A Ghibelline by birth and disposition; yet, from circumstances, a close ally of the Guelfs of Florence.

were professedly the party of strictness and religion, a profession which fettered them as little as their opponents were fettered by the respect they claimed for imperial law. But though by personal unscrupulousness and selfishness, and in instances of public vengeance, they sinned as deeply as the Ghibellines, they stood far more committed as a party to a public meaning and purpose—to improvement in law and the condition of the poor, to a protest against the insolence of the strong, to the encouragement of industry. The genuine Guelf spirit was austere, frugal, independent, earnest, religious, fond of its home and Church, and of those celebrations which bound together Church and home; but withal very proud, very intolerant; in its higher form intolerant of evil, but intolerant always to whatever displeased it. Yet there was a grave and noble manliness about it which long kept it alive in Florence. It had not as yet turned itself against the practical corruptions of the Church, which was its ally; but this also it was to do, when the popes had forsaken the cause of liberty, and leagued themselves with the brilliant tyranny of the Medici. Then Savonarola invoked, and not in vain, the stern old Guelf spirit of resistance, of domestic purity and severity, and of domestic religion, against unbelief and licentiousness even in the Church; and the Guelf "*Piagnoni*" presented, in

a more simple and generous shape, a resemblance to our own Puritans, as the Ghibellines often recall the coarser and worse features of our own Cavaliers.

In Florence, these distinctions had become mere nominal ones, confined to the great families who carried on their private feuds under the old party names, when Frederick II. once more gave them their meaning. "Although the accursed Guelf and Ghibelline factions lasted amongst the nobles of Florence, and they often waged war among themselves out of private grudges, and took sides for the said factions, and held one with another, and those who called themselves Guelfs desired the establishment of the Pope and Holy Church, and those who called themselves Ghibellines favoured the Emperor and his adherents, yet withal the people and commonalty of Florence maintained itself in unity, to the wellbeing and honour and establishment of the commonwealth."[1] But the appearance on the scene of an emperor of such talent and bold designs revived the languid contest, and gave to party a cause, and to individual passions and ambition an impulse and pretext. The division between Guelf and Ghibelline again became serious, involved all Florence, armed house against house, and neighbourhood against neighbourhood, issued in merciless and vindictive

[1] G. Villani, vi. 33.

warfare, grew on into a hopeless and deadly breach, and finally lost to Florence, without remedy or repair, half her noble houses and the love of the greatest of her sons. The old badge of their common country became to the two factions the sign of their implacable hatred; the white lily of Florence, borne by the Ghibellines, was turned to red by the Guelfs, and the flower of two colours marked a civil strife as cruel and as fatal, if on a smaller scale, as that of the English roses.[1]

It was waged with the peculiar characteristics of Italian civil war. There the city itself was the scene of battle. A thirteenth-century city in Italy bore on its face the evidence that it was built and arranged for such emergencies. Its crowded and narrow streets were a collection of rival castles, whose tall towers, rising thick and close over its roofs, or hanging perilously over its close courts, attested the emulous pride and the insecurity of Italian civic life. There, within a separate precinct, flanked and faced by jealous friends or deadly enemies, were clustered together the dwellings of the various members of each great house—their common home and the monument of their magnificence and pride, and capable of being, as was so often necessary, their common refuge. In these fortresses of the leading families, scattered

[1] G. Villani, vi. 33, 43; *Parad.* 19.

about the city, were the various points of onset and recovery in civic battle; in the streets barricades were raised, mangonels and crossbows were plied from the towers, a series of separate combats raged through the city, till chance at length connected the attacks of one side, or some panic paralysed the resistance of the other, or a conflagration interposed itself between the combatants, burning out at once Guelf and Ghibelline, and laying half Florence in ashes. Each party had their turn of victory; each, when vanquished, went into exile, and carried on the war outside the walls; each had their opportunity of remodelling the orders and framework of government, and each did so relentlessly at the cost of their opponents. They excluded classes, they proscribed families, they confiscated property, they sacked and burned warehouses, they levelled the palaces, and outraged the pride of their antagonists. To destroy was not enough, without adding to it the keenest and newest refinement of insult. Two buildings in Florence were peculiarly dear—among their "*cari luoghi*"—to the popular feeling and the Guelf party: the Baptistery of St. John, "il mio bel San Giovanni," "to which all the good people resorted on Sundays,"[1] where they had all received baptism, where they had been married, where families were solemnly

[1] G. Villani, vi. 33, iv. 10; *Inf.* 19; *Parad.* 25.

reconciled; and a tall and beautiful tower close by it, called the "Torre del Guardamorto," where the bodies of the "good people," who of old were all buried at San Giovanni, rested on their way to the grave. The victorious Ghibellines, when they levelled the Guelf towers, overthrew this one, and endeavoured to make it crush in its fall the sacred church, "which," says the old chronicler, "was prevented by a miracle." The Guelfs, when their day came, built the walls of Florence with the stones of Ghibelline palaces.[1] One great family stands out pre-eminent in this fierce conflict as the victim and monument of party war. The head of the Ghibellines was the proud and powerful house of the Uberti, who shared with another great Ghibelline family, the Pazzi, the valley of the upper Arno. They lighted up the war in the Emperor's cause. They supported its weight and guided it. In time of peace they were foremost and unrestrained in defiance of law and in scorn of the people—in war, the people's fiercest and most active enemies. Heavy sufferers, in their property, and by the sword and axe, yet untamed and incorrigible, they led the van in that battle, so long remembered to their cost by the Guelfs, the battle of Monteaperti (1260)—

[1] G. Villani, vi. 39, 65.

Lo strazio, e 'l gran scempio
Che fece l' Arbia colorata in rossa.—*Inf.* 10.[1]

That the head of their house, Farinata, saved Florence from the vengeance of his meaner associates, was not enough to atone for the unpardonable wrongs which they had done to the Guelfs and the democracy. When the red lily of the Guelfs finally supplanted the white one as the arms of Florence, and the badge of Guelf triumph, they were proscribed for ever, like the Peisistratidæ and the Tarquins. In every amnesty their names were excepted. The site on which their houses had stood was never again to be built upon, and remains the Great Square of Florence; the architect of the Palace of the People was obliged to sacrifice its symmetry, and to place it awry, that its walls might not encroach on the accursed ground.[2] "They had been," says a writer, contemporary with Dante, speaking of the time when he also became an exile; "they had been for more than forty years outlaws from their country, nor ever found mercy nor pity, remaining always abroad in great state, nor ever abased their honour, seeing that they ever abode

[1] The slaughter and great havoc, I replied,
That coloured Arbia's flood with crimson stain.

[2] G. Villani, vi. 33, viii. 26; Vasari, *Arnolfo di Lapo*, i. 255 (Fir. 1846).

with kings and lords, and to great things applied themselves."[1] They were loved as they were hated. When, under the protection of a cardinal, one of them visited the city, and the chequered blue and gold blazon of their house was, after an interval of half a century, again seen in the streets of Florence; "many ancient Ghibelline men and women pressed to kiss the arms,"[2] and even the common people did him honour.

But the fortunes of Florentine factions depended on other causes than merely the address or vigour of their leaders. From the year of Dante's birth and Charles's victory, Florence, as far as we shall have to do with it, became irrevocably Guelf. Not that the whole commonalty of Florence formally called itself Guelf, or that the Guelf party was coextensive with it; but the city was controlled by Guelf councils, devoted to the objects of the great Guelf party, and received in return the support of that party in curbing the pride of the nobles and maintaining democratic forms. The Guelf party of Florence, though it was the life and soul of the republic, and irresistible in its disposal of the influence and arms of Florence, and though it embraced a large number of the most powerful families, is always spoken of as something distinct from, and external to, the governing powers, and the whole body of the people. It

[1] *Dino Compagni*, p. 88. [2] *Ibid.* p. 107.

was a body with a separate and self-constituted existence;—in the state and allied to it, but an independent element, holding on to a large and comprehensive union without the state. Its organisation in Florence is one of the most curious among the many curious combinations which meet us in Italian history. After the final expulsion of the Ghibellines the Guelf party took form as an institution, with definite powers, and a local existence. It appears with as distinct a shape as the Jacobin Club or the Orange Lodges, side by side with the government. It was a corporate body with a common seal, common property, not only in funds but lands—officers, archives, a common palace,[1] a great council, a secret committee, and last of all, a public accuser of the Ghibellines; of the confiscated Ghibelline estates one-third went to the republic, another third to compensate individual Guelfs, the rest was assigned to the Guelf party.[2] A pope (Clement IV., 1265-68) had granted them his own arms;[3] and their device, a red eagle clutching a serpent, may be yet seen, with the red lily, and the party-coloured banner of the commonalty, on the battlements of the Palazzo Vecchio.

But the expulsion of the Ghibellines did but little

[1] Giotto painted in it: Vasari, *Vit. di Giotto*, p. 314.
[2] G. Villani, vii. 2, 17. [3] *Ibid.* vii. 2.

to restore peace. The great Guelf families, as old as many of the Ghibellines, had as little reverence as they for law or civic rights. Below these, the acknowledged nobility of Florence, were the leading families of the "people," houses, created by successful industry or commerce, and pushing up into that privileged order, which, however ignored and even discredited by the laws, was fully recognised by feeling and opinion in the most democratic times of the republic. Rivalries and feuds, street broils and conspiracies, high-handed insolence from the great men, rough vengeance from the populace, still continued to vex jealous and changeful Florence. The popes sought in vain to keep in order their quarrelsome liegemen; to reconcile Guelf with Guelf, and even Guelf with Ghibelline. Embassies went and came, to ask for mediation and to proffer it; to apply the healing paternal hand; to present an obsequious and ostentatious submission. Cardinal legates came in state, and were received with reverential pomp; they formed private committees, and held assemblies, and made marriages; they harangued in honeyed words, and gained the largest promises; on one occasion the Great Square was turned into a vast theatre, and on this stage one hundred and fifty dissidents on each side came forward, and in the presence and with the benediction of the cardinal kissed each other

on the mouth.[1] And if persuasion failed, the Pope's representative hesitated not to excommunicate and interdict the faithful but obdurate city. But whether excommunicated or blessed, Florence could not be at peace; however wise and subtle had been the peacemaker's arrangements, his departing *cortège* was hardly out of sight of the city before they were blown to the winds. Not more successful were the efforts of the sensible and moderate citizens who sighed for tranquillity within its walls. Dino Compagni's interesting though not very orderly narrative describes with great frankness, and with the perplexity of a simple-hearted man puzzled by the continual triumph of clever wickedness, the variety and the fruitlessness of the expedients devised by him and other good citizens against the resolute and incorrigible selfishness of the great Guelfs—ever, when checked in one form, breaking out in another; proof against all persuasion, all benefits; not to be bound by law, or compact, or oath; eluding or turning to its own account the deepest and sagest contrivances of constitutional wisdom.

A great battle won against Ghibelline Arezzo[2] raised the renown and the military spirit of the Guelf party, for the fame of the battle was very

[1] G. Villani, vii. 56.

[2] *Campaldino*, in 1289. G. Vill. vii. 131; *Dino Comp.* p. 14.

great; the hosts contained the choicest chivalry of either side, armed and appointed with emulous splendour. The fighting was hard, there was brilliant and conspicuous gallantry, and the victory was complete. It sealed Guelf ascendancy. The Ghibelline warrior-bishop of Arezzo fell, with three of the Uberti, and other Ghibelline chiefs. It was a day of trial. "Many that day who had been thought of great prowess were found dastards, and many who had never been spoken of were held in high esteem." It repaired the honour of Florence, and the citizens showed their feeling of its importance by mixing up the marvellous with its story. Its tidings came to Florence—so runs the tale in Villani, who declares what he "heard and saw" himself—at the very hour in which it was won. The Priors of the Republic were resting in their palace during the noonday heat; suddenly the chamber door was shaken, and the cry heard: "Rise up! the Aretini are defeated." The door was opened, but there was no one; their servants had seen no one enter the palace, and no one came from the army till the hour of vespers, on a long summer's day. In this battle the Guelf leaders had won great glory. The hero of the day was the proudest, handsomest, craftiest, most winning, most ambitious, most unscrupulous Guelf noble in Florence —one of a family who inherited the spirit and reck-

lessness of the proscribed Uberti, and did not refuse the popular epithet of "*Malefami*"—Corso Donati. He did not come back from the field of Campaldino, where he had won the battle by disobeying orders, with any increased disposition to yield to rivals, or court the populace, or respect other men's rights. Those rivals, too—and they also had fought gallantly in the post of honour at Campaldino—were such as he hated from his soul—rivals whom he despised, and who yet were too strong for him. His blood was ancient, they were upstarts; he was a soldier, they were traders; he was poor, they the richest men in Florence. They had come to live close to the Donati, they had bought the palace of an old Ghibelline family, they had enlarged, adorned, and fortified it, and kept great state there. They had crossed him in marriages, bargains, inheritances. They had won popularity, honour, influence; and yet they were but men of business, while he had a part in all the political movements of the day. He was the friend and intimate of lords and noblemen, with great connexions and famous through all Italy; they were the favourites of the common people for their kindness and good nature; they even showed consideration for Ghibellines. He was an accomplished man of the world, keen and subtle, "full of malicious thoughts, mischievous and crafty;" they were inexperienced in

intrigue, and had the reputation of being clumsy and stupid. He was the most graceful and engaging of courtiers; they were not even gentlemen. Lastly, in the debates of that excitable republic he was the most eloquent speaker, and they were tongue-tied.[1]

"There was a family," writes Dino Compagni, "who called themselves the Cerchi, men of low estate, but good merchants and very rich; and they dressed richly, and maintained many servants and horses, and made a brave show; and some of them bought the palace of the Conti Guidi, which was near the houses of the Pazzi and Donati, who were more ancient of blood but not so rich; therefore, seeing the Cerchi rise to great dignity, and that they had walled and enlarged the palace, and kept great state, the Donati began to have a great hatred against them." Villani gives the same account of the feud.[2] "It began in that quarter of scandal the Sesto of Porta St. Piero, between the Cerchi and Donati, on the one side through jealousy, on the other through churlish rudeness. Of the house of the Cerchi was head Messer Vieri de' Cerchi, and he and those of his house were people of great business, and powerful, and of great relationships, and most wealthy traders, so that their company was one of the greatest in the world; men they were of soft life, and who meant no harm;

[1] *Dino Comp.* pp. 32, 75, 94, 133. [2] G. Vill. viii. 39

boorish and ill-mannered, like people who had come in a short time to great state and power. The Donati were gentlemen and warriors, and of no excessive wealth. . . . They were neighbours in Florence and in the country, and by the conversation of their jealousy with the peevish boorishness of the others, arose the proud scorn that there was between them." The glories of Campaldino were not as oil on these troubled waters. The conquerors flouted each other all the more fiercely in the streets on their return, and ill-treated the lower people with less scruple. No gathering for festive or serious purposes could be held without tempting strife. A marriage, a funeral, a ball, a gay procession of cavaliers and ladies—any meeting where one stood while another sat, where horse or man might jostle another, where pride might be nettled or temper shown, was in danger of ending in blood. The lesser quarrels meanwhile ranged themselves under the greater ones; and these, especially that between the Cerchi and Donati, took more and more a political character. The Cerchi inclined more and more to the trading classes and the lower people; they threw themselves on their popularity, and began to hold aloof from the meetings of the "Parte Guelfa," while this organised body became an instrument in the hands of their opponents, a club of the nobles. Corso Donati,

besides mischief of a more substantial kind, turned his ridicule on their solemn dulness and awkward speech, and his friends the jesters, one Scampolino in particular, carried his gibes and nicknames all over Florence. The Cerchi received all in sullen and dogged indifference. They were satisfied with repelling attacks, and nursed their hatred.[1]

Thus the city was divided, and the attempts to check the factions only exasperated them. It was in vain that, when at times the government and the populace lost patience, severe measures were taken. It was in vain that the reformer, Gian della Bella, carried for a time his harsh "orders of justice" against the nobles, and invested popular vengeance with the solemnity of law and with the pomp and ceremony of a public act—that when a noble had been convicted of killing a citizen, the great officer, "Standard-bearer," as he was called, "of justice," issued forth in state and procession, with the banner of justice borne before him, with all his train, and at the head of the armed citizens, to the house of the criminal, and razed it to the ground. An eye-witness describes the effect of such chastisement:—"I, Dino Compagni, being Gonfalonier of Justice in 1293, went to their houses, and to those of their relations, and these I caused to be pulled down according to

[1] *Dino Compagni*, pp. 32, 34, 38.

the laws. This beginning in the case of the other Gonfaloniers came to an evil effect; because, if they demolished the houses according to the laws, the people said that they were cruel; and if they did not demolish them completely, they said that they were cowards; and many distorted justice for fear of the people." Gian della Bella was overthrown with few regrets even on the part of the people. Equally vain was the attempt to keep the peace by separating the leaders of the disturbances. They were banished by a kind of ostracism; they departed in ostentatious meekness, Corso Donato to plot at Rome, Vieri de' Cerchi to return immediately to Florence. Anarchy had got too fast a hold on the city, and it required a stronger hand than that of the pope, or the signory of the Republic, to keep it down.

Yet Florence prospered. Every year it grew richer, more intellectual, more refined, more beautiful, more gay. With its anarchy there was no stagnation. Torn and divided as it was, its energy did not slacken, its busy and creative spirit was not deadened, its hopefulness not abated. The factions, fierce and personal as they were, did not hinder that interest in political ideas, that active and subtle study of the questions of civil government, that passion and ingenuity displayed in political contrivance, which now pervaded Northern Italy, everywhere marvellously

patient and hopeful, though far from being equally successful. In Venice at the close of the thirteenth century, that polity was finally settled and consolidated, by which she was great as long as cities could be imperial, and which even in its decay survived the monarchy of Louis XIV. and existed within the memory of living men.[1] In Florence the constructive spirit of law and order only resisted, but never triumphed. Yet it was resolute and sanguine, and not yet dispirited by continual failure. Political interest, however, and party contests were not sufficient to absorb and employ the citizens of Florence. Their genial and versatile spirit, so keen, so inventive, so elastic, which made them such hot and impetuous partisans, kept them from being only this. The time was one of growth; new knowledge, new powers, new tastes were opening to men — new pursuits attracted them. There was commerce, there was the school philosophy, there was the science of nature, there was ancient learning, there was the civil law, there were the arts, there was poetry, all rude as yet, and unformed, but full of hope—the living parents of mightier offspring. Frederick II. had once more opened Aristotle to the Latin world; he had given an impulse to the study of the great monuments of Roman legislation which was responded to through

[1] [This was written in 1850.]

Italy; himself a poet, his example and his splendid court had made poetry fashionable. In the end of the thirteenth century a great stride was made at Florence. While her great poet was growing up to manhood, as rapid a change went on in her streets, her social customs, the wealth of her citizens, their ideas of magnificence and beauty, their appreciation of literature. It was the age of growing commerce and travel; Franciscan missionaries had reached China, and settled there;[1] in 1294 Marco Polo returned to Venice, the first successful explorer of the East. The merchants of Florence lagged not; their field of operation was Italy and the West; they had their correspondents in London, Paris, and Bruges; they were the bankers of popes and kings.[2] And their city shows to this day the wealth and magnificence of the last years of the thirteenth century. The ancient buildings, consecrated in the memory of the Florentine people, were repaired, enlarged, adorned with marble and bronze—Or San Michele, the Badia, the Baptistery; and new buildings rose on a grander scale. In 1294 was begun the

[1] See the curious letters of *John de Monte Corvino* about his mission in Cathay, 1289-1305, in Wadding, vi. 69.

[2] *E.g.* the *Mozzi*, of Greg. X.; *Peruzzi*, of Philip le Bel; *Spini*, of Boniface VIII.; *Cerchi del Garbo*, of Benedict XI. (G. Vill. vii. 42, viii. 63, 71; *Dino Comp.* p. 35).

Mausoleum of the great Florentine dead, the Church of St. Croce. In the same year, a few months later, Arnolfo laid the deep foundations which were afterwards to bear up Brunelleschi's dome, and traced the plan of the magnificent cathedral. In 1298 he began to raise a Town-hall worthy of the Republic, and of being the habitation of its magistrates, the frowning mass of the Palazzo Vecchio. In 1299 the third circle of the walls was commenced with the benediction of bishops, and the concourse of all the "lords and orders" of Florence. And Giotto was now beginning to throw Cimabue into the shade—Giotto, the shepherd's boy, painter, sculptor, architect, and engineer at once, who a few years later was to complete and crown the architectural glories of Florence by that masterpiece of grace, his marble Campanile.

Fifty years made then all that striking difference in domestic habits, in the materials of dress, in the value of money, which they have usually made in later centuries. The poet of the fourteenth century describes the proudest nobleman of a hundred years before "with his leathern girdle and clasp of bone;" and in one of the most beautiful of all poetic celebrations of the good old time, draws the domestic life of ancient Florence in the household where his ancestor was born:

A così riposato, a così bello
Viver di cittadini, a così fida
Cittadinanza, a così dolce ostello
Maria mi diè, chiamata in alte grida.—*Parad.* c. 15.[1]

There high-born dames, he says, still plied the distaff and the loom; still rocked the cradle with the words which their own mothers had used; or working with their maidens, told them old tales of the forefathers of the city, "of the Trojans, of Fiesole, and of Rome." Villani still finds this rudeness within forty years of the end of the century, almost within the limits of his own and Dante's life; and speaks of that "old

[1] Florence, confined within that ancient wall,
Whence still the chimes at noon and evening sound,
Was sober, modest, and at peace with all.

. . . . .

Myself have seen Bellincion Berti pace
The street in leathern belt; his lady come
Forth from her toilet with unpainted face.

. . . . .

Oh happy wives! each sure to lay her head
In her own tomb; and no one yet compelled
To weep deserted in a lonely bed.

. . . . .

To such pure life of beauty and repose—
Such faithful citizens—such happy men—
The Virgin gave me, when my mother's throes
Forced her with cries to call on Mary's name.—WRIGHT.

first people," *il primo Popolo Vecchio*, with their coarse food and expenditure, their leather jerkins, and plain close gowns, their small dowries and late marriages, as if they were the first founders of the city, and not a generation which had lasted on into his own.[1] Twenty years later his story is of the gaiety, the riches, the profuse munificence, the brilliant festivities, the careless and joyous life which attracted foreigners to Florence as the city of pleasure; of companies of a thousand or more, all clad in white robes, under a lord, styled "of Love," passing their time in sports and dances; of ladies and knights, "going through the city with trumpets and other instruments, with joy and gladness," and meeting together in banquets evening and morning; entertaining illustrious strangers, and honourably escorting them on horseback in their passage through the city; tempting by their liberality, courtiers, and wits, and minstrels, and jesters, to add to the amusements of Florence.[2] Nor were these the boisterous triumphs of unrefined and coarse merriment. How variety of character was drawn out, how its more delicate elements were elicited and tempered, how nicely it was observed, and how finely drawn, let the racy and open-eyed story-tellers of Florence testify.

[1] G. Vill. vi. 69 (1259).

[2] *Ibid.* vii. 89 (1283).

Not perhaps in these troops of revellers, but amid music and song, and in the pleasant places of social and private life, belonging to the Florence of arts and poetry, not to the Florence of factions and strife, should we expect to find the friend of the sweet singer, Casella, and of the reserved and bold speculator, Guido Cavalcanti; the mystic poet of the *Vita Nuova*, so sensitive and delicate, trembling at a gaze or a touch, recording visions, painting angels, composing Canzoni and commenting on them; finally devoting himself to the austere consolations of deep study. To superadd to such a character that of a democratic politician of the Middle Ages, seems an incongruous and harsh combination. Yet it was a real one in this instance. The scholar's life is, in our idea of it, far separated from the practical and the political; we have been taught by our experience to disjoin enthusiasm in love, in art, in what is abstract or imaginative, from keen interest and successful interference in the affairs and conflicts of life. The practical man may sometimes be also a *dilettante*; but the dreamer or the thinker, wisely or indolently, keeps out of the rough ways where real passions and characters meet and jostle, or if he ventures, seldom gains honour there. The separation, though a natural one, grows wider as society becomes more vast and manifold, as its ends, functions, and pursuits are dis-

entangled, while they multiply. But in Dante's time, and in an Italian city, it was not such a strange thing that the most refined and tender interpreter of feeling, the popular poet, whose verses touched all hearts, and were in every mouth, should be also at once the ardent follower of all abstruse and difficult learning, and a prominent character among those who administered the State. In that narrow sphere of action, in that period of dawning powers and circumscribed knowledge, it seemed no unreasonable hope or unwise ambition to attempt the compassing of all science, and to make it subserve and illustrate the praise of active citizenship.[1] Dante, like other literary celebrities of the time, was not less from the custom of the day, than from his own purpose, a public man. He took his place among his fellow-citizens; he went out to war with them; he fought, it is said, among the skirmishers at the great Guelf victory of Campaldino; to qualify himself for office in the democracy, he enrolled himself in one of the Guilds of the people, and was matriculated in the "Art" of the Apothecaries; he served the State as its agent abroad; he went on important missions to the cities and courts of Italy—according to a Florentine tradition, which enumerates fourteen distinct embassies, even to Hungary and France. In the memorable year of

[1] *Vide* the opening of the *De Monarchia*.

Jubilee, 1300, he was one of the Priors of the Republic. There is no shrinking from fellowship and co-operation and conflict with the keen or bold men of the market-place and council-hall, in that mind of exquisite and, as drawn by itself, exaggerated sensibility. The doings and characters of men, the workings of society, the fortunes of Italy, were watched and thought of with as deep an interest as the courses of the stars, and read in the real spectacle of life with as profound emotion as in the miraculous page of Virgil; and no scholar ever read Virgil with such feeling—no astronomer ever watched the stars with more eager inquisitiveness. The whole man opens to the world around him; all affections and powers, soul and sense, diligently and thoughtfully directed and trained, with free and concurrent and equal energy, with distinct yet harmonious purposes, seek out their respective and appropriate objects, moral, intellectual, natural, spiritual, in that admirable scene and hard field where man is placed to labour and love, to be exercised, proved, and judged.

In a fresco in the chapel of the old palace of the Podestà[1] at Florence is a portrait of Dante, said to be by the hand of his contemporary Giotto. It was discovered in 1841 under the whitewash, and a tracing

[1] The Bargello, a prison (1850); a museum (1878). *Vide* Vasari, p. 311.

made by Mr. Seymour Kirkup has been reproduced in facsimile by the Arundel Society. The fresco was afterwards restored or repainted with no happy success. He is represented as he might have been in the year of Campaldino (1289). The countenance is youthful yet manly, more manly than it appears in the engravings of the picture; but it only suggests the strong deep features of the well-known traditional face. He is drawn with much of the softness, and melancholy pensive sweetness, and with something also of the quaint stiffness of the *Vita Nuova*—with his flower and his book. With him is drawn his master, Brunetto Latini,[1] and Corso Donati. We do not know what occasion led Giotto thus to associate him with the great "Baron." Dante was, indeed, closely connected with the Donati. The dwelling of his family was near theirs, in the "Quarter of Scandal," the Ward of the Porta St. Piero. He married a daughter of their house, Madonna Gemma. None of his friends are commemorated with more affection than the companion of his light and wayward days, remembered not without a shade of anxious sadness, yet with love and hope, Corso's brother, Forese.[2] No sweeter spirit sings and smiles in the illumined spheres of Paradise, than she whom Forese remembers as on earth one,

[1] He died in 1294. G. Vill. viii. 10. [2] *Purg.* c. 23.

Che tra bella e buona
Non so qual fosse più.—*Purg.* c. 24.[1]

and who, from the depth of her heavenly joy, teaches the poet that in the lowest place among the blessed there can be no envy[2]—the sister of Forese and Corso, Piccarda. The *Commedia*, though it speaks, as if in prophecy, of Corso's miserable death, avoids the mention of his name.[3] Its silence is so remarkable as to seem significant. But though history does not group together Corso and Dante, the picture represents the truth—their fortunes were linked together. They were actors in the same scene—at this distance of time two of the most prominent; though a scene very different from that calm and grave assembly which Giotto's placid pencil has drawn on the old chapel wall.

The outlines of this part of Dante's history are so well known that it is not necessary to dwell on them; and more than the outlines we know not. The family quarrels came to a head, issued in parties, and the parties took names; they borrowed them from two rival factions in a neighbouring town, Pistoia, whose feud was imported into Florence; and the Guelfs became divided into the Black Guelfs who were led

[1] My sister, good and beautiful—which most I know not. WRIGHT.

[2] *Parad.* c. 8.

[3] *Purg.* c. 24, 82-87.

by the Donati, and the White Guelfs who sided with the Cerchi.[1] It still professed to be but a family feud, confined to the great houses; but they were too powerful and Florence too small for it not to affect the whole Republic. The middle classes and the artisans looked on, and for a time not without satisfaction, at the strife of the great men; but it grew evident that one party must crush the other, and become dominant in Florence; and of the two, the Cerchi and their White adherents were less formidable to the democracy than the unscrupulous and overbearing Donati, with their military renown and lordly tastes; proud not merely of being nobles, but Guelf nobles; always loyal champions, once the martyrs, and now the hereditary assertors, of the great Guelf cause. The Cerchi with less character and less zeal, but rich, liberal, and showy, and with more of rough kindness and vulgar good-nature for the common people, were more popular in Guelf Florence than the "Parte Guelfa;" and, of course, the Ghibellines wished them well. Both the contemporary historians of Florence lead us to think that they might have been the governors and guides of the Republic—if they had chosen, and had known how; and both, though condemning the two parties equally, seemed to have thought that this would have

[1] In 1300. G. Villani, viii. 38, 39.

been the best result for the State. But the accounts of both, though they are very different writers, agree in their scorn of the leaders of the White Guelfs. They were upstarts, purse-proud, vain, and coarse-minded; and they dared to aspire to an ambition which they were too dull and too cowardly to pursue, when the game was in their hands. They wished to rule; but when they might, they were afraid. The commons were on their side, the moderate men, the party of law, the lovers of republican government, and for the most part the magistrates; but they shrank from their fortune, "more from cowardice than from goodness, because they exceedingly feared their adversaries."[1] Boniface VIII. had no prepossessions in Florence, except for energy and an open hand; the side which was most popular he would have accepted and backed; but "he would not lose," he said, "the men for the women." "*Io non voglio perdere gli uomini per le femminelle.*"[2] If the Black party furnished types for the grosser or fiercer forms of wickedness in the poet's Hell, the White party surely were the originals of that picture of stupid and cowardly selfishness, in the miserable crowd who moan and are buffeted in the vestibule of the Pit,

[1] *Dino Comp.* p. 45.

[2] I am not going to lose the men for the old women.—*Ibid.* p. 62.

mingled with the angels who dared neither to rebel nor be faithful, but "*were for themselves*;" and whoever it may be who is singled out in the "setta dei cattivi," for deeper and special scorn—he,

Che fece per viltà il gran rifiuto.—*Inf.* c. 3, 60.[1]

the idea was derived from the Cerchi in Florence.

A French prince was sent by the Pope to mediate and make peace in Florence. The Black Guelfs and Corso Donati came with him. The magistrates were overawed and perplexed. The White party were, step by step, amused, entrapped, led blindly into false plots, entangled in the elaborate subtleties, and exposed with all the zest and mockery, of Italian intrigue—finally chased out of their houses and from the city, condemned unheard, outlawed, ruined in name and property, by the Pope's French mediator. With them fell many citizens who had tried to hold the balance between the two parties; for the leaders of the Black Guelfs were guilty of no errors of weakness. In two extant lists of the proscribed—condemned by default, for corruption and various crimes, especially for hindering the entrance into Florence of Charles de Valois, to a heavy fine and banishment—then, two months after, for contumacy, to be burned alive if he ever fell into the hands of the Republic—

[1] The coward who the great refusal made.

appears the name of Dante Alighieri; and more than this, concerning the history of his expulsion, we know not.[1]

Of his subsequent life, history tells us little more than the general character. He acted for a time in concert with the expelled party, when they attempted to force their way back to Florence; he gave them up at last in scorn and despair; but he never returned to Florence. And he found no new home for the rest of his days. Nineteen years, from his exile to his death, he was a wanderer. The character is stamped on his writings. History, tradition, documents, all scanty or dim, do but disclose him to us at different points, appearing here and there, we are not told how or why. One old record, discovered by antiquarian industry, shows him in a village church near Florence, planning, with the Cerchi and the White party, an attack on the Black Guelfs. In another, he appears in the Val di Magra, making peace between its small potentates: in another, as the inhabitant of a certain street in Padua. The traditions of some remote spots about Italy still connect his name with a ruined tower, a mountain glen, a cell in a convent. In the recollections of the following generation, his solemn and melancholy form mingled

[1] Pelli, *Memorie per servire alla vita di Dante.* Fir. 1823, pp. 105, 106.

reluctantly, and for a while, in the brilliant court of the Scaligers; and scared the women, as a visitant of the other world, as he passed by their doors in the streets of Verona. Rumour brings him to the West—with probability to Paris, more doubtfully to Oxford. But little certain can be made out about the places where he was an honoured and admired, but it may be, not always a welcome guest, till we find him sheltered, cherished, and then laid at last to rest, by the Lords of Ravenna. There he still rests, in a small, solitary chapel, built, not by a Florentine, but a Venetian. Florence, "that mother of little love," asked for his bones; but rightly asked in vain.[1] His place of repose is better in those remote and forsaken streets "by the shore of the Adrian Sea," hard by the last relics of the Roman Empire—the mausoleum of the children of Theodosius, and the mosaics of Justinian—than among the assembled dead of St. Croce, or amid the magnificence of Santa Maria del Fiore.[2]

[1] See Dr. Barlow's *Sixth Centenary Festivals of Dante.* (1866.)

[2] These notices have been carefully collected by *Pelli*, who seems to have left little to glean (*Memorie*, etc., Ed. 2da, 1823) A few additions have been made by *Gerini* (*Mem. Stor. della Lunigiana*), and *Troya* (*Veltro Allegorico*), but they are not of much importance. *Arrivabene* (*Secolo di Dante*) has brought together a mass of illustration which is very useful, and would be more so, if he were more careful and quoted his authorities.

The *Commedia*, at the first glance, shows the traces of its author's life. It is the work of a wanderer. The very form in which it is cast is that of a journey, difficult, toilsome, perilous, and full of change. It is more than a working out of that touching phraseology of the Middle Ages, in which "the way" was the technical theological expression for this mortal life; and "*viator*" meant man in his state of trial, as "*comprehensor*" meant man made perfect, having attained to his heavenly country. It is more than merely this. The writer's mind is full of the recollections and definite images of his various journeys. The permanent scenery of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, very variously and distinctly marked, is that of travel. The descent down the sides of the Pit, and the ascent of the Sacred Mountain, show one familiar with such scenes—one who had climbed painfully in perilous passes, and grown dizzy on the brink of narrow ledges over sea or torrent. It is scenery from the gorges of the Alps and Apennines, or the terraces and precipices of the Riviera. Local reminiscences abound:—the severed rocks of the Adige Valley—the waterfall of St. Benedetto—the crags of Pietra-pana and St. Leo, which overlook the plains of Lucca and

Balbo arranges these materials with sense and good feeling; though, as a writer, he is below his subject. A few traits and anecdotes may be found in the novelists—as Sacchetti. [1850.]

Ravenna—the "fair river" that flows among the poplars between Chiaveri and Sestri—the marble quarries of Carrara—the "rough and desert ways between Lerici and Turbia," and those towery cliffs, going sheer into the deep sea at Noli, which travellers on the Corniche road some thirty years ago may yet remember with fear. Mountain experience furnished that picture of the traveller caught in an Alpine mist and gradually climbing above it; seeing the vapours grow thin, and the sun's orb appear faintly through them; and issuing at last into sunshine on the mountain top, while the light of sunset was lost already on the shores below:

Ai raggi, morti già nei bassi lidi.—*Purg.* 17.[1]

or that image of the cold dull shadow over the torrent, beneath the Alpine fir—

Un' ombra smorta
Qual sotto foglie verdi e rami nigri
Sovra suoi freddi rivi, l' Alpe porta.—*Purg.* 33.[2]

or of the large snowflakes falling without wind, among the mountains—

[1] The beams on the low shores now lost and dead.

[2] A death-like shade—
Like that beneath black boughs and foliage green
O'er the cold streams in Alpine glens display'd.—WRIGHT.

d' un cader lento
Piovean di fuoco dilatate falde
Come di neve in Alpe senza vento.—*Inf.* 14.[1]

He delights in a local name and local image—the boiling pitch, and the clang of the shipwrights in the arsenal of Venice—the sepulchral fields of Arles and Pola—the hot-spring of Viterbo—the hooded monks of Cologne—the dykes of Flanders and Padua—the Maremma, with its rough brushwood, its wild boars, its snakes, and fevers. He had listened to the south wind among the pine tops, in the forest by the sea, at Ravenna. He had watched under the Carisenda tower at Bologna, and seen the driving clouds "give away their motion" to it, and make it seem to be falling; and had noticed how at Rome the October sun sets between Corsica and Sardinia.[2] His images of the sea are numerous and definite—the ship backing out of the tier in harbour, the diver plunging after the fouled anchor, the mast rising, the ship going fast before the wind, the water closing in its wake, the arched backs of the porpoises the forerunners of a gale, the admiral watching everything from poop to prow, the oars stopping altogether at the sound of

[1] O'er all the sandy desert falling slow,
Were shower'd dilated flakes of fire, like snow
On Alpine summits, when the wind is low.—WRIGHT.

[2] *Inf.* 31, 18.

the whistle, the swelling sails becoming slack when the mast snaps and falls.[1] Nowhere could we find so many of the most characteristic and strange sensations of the traveller touched with such truth. Every one knows the lines which speak of the voyager's sinking of heart on the first evening at sea, and of the longings wakened in the traveller at the beginning of his journey by the distant evening bell;[2] the traveller's *morning* feelings are not less delicately noted—the strangeness on first waking in the open air with the sun high; morning thoughts, as day by day he wakes nearer home; the morning sight of the sea-beach quivering in the early light—

> Da lontano
> Conobbi il tremolar della marina.—*Purg.* 1, 117.[3]

the tarrying and lingering, before setting out in the morning[4]—

> Noi eravam lunghesso 'l mare ancora,
> Come gente che pensa al suo cammino,
> Che va col cuore, e col corpo dimora.[5]

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[1] *Inf.* 17, 16, 31; *Purg.* 24; *Parad.* 2; *Inf.* 22; *Purg.* 30; *Parad.* 25; *Inf.* 7. [2] *Purg.* 8. "Era già l' ora," etc.

[3] I knew from far the sea-beach trembling.

[4] *Purg.* 19, 27, 1, 2.

[5] By ocean's shore we still prolonged our stay
Like men, who, thinking of a journey near,
Advance in thought, while yet their limbs delay.—WRIGHT.

He has recorded equally the anxiety, the curiosity, the suspicion with which, in those times, stranger met and eyed stranger on the road; and a still more characteristic trait is to be found in those lines where he describes the pilgrim gazing around in the church of his vow, and thinking how he shall tell of it:

E quasi peregrin che si ricrea
Nel tempio del suo voto riguardando,
E spera già ridir com' ello stea—*Parad.* 31.[1]

or again, in that description, so simple and touching, of his thoughts while waiting to see the relic for which he left his home:

Quale è colui che forse di Croazia
Viene a veder la Veronica nostra,
Che per l' antica fama non si sazia,
Ma dice nel pensier, fin che si mostra;
Signor mio Gesù Cristo, Dio verace,
Or fu sì fatta la sembianza vostra?—*Parad.* 31.[2]

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[1] And like a pilgrim who with fond delight
Surveys the temple he has vow'd to see,
And hopes one day its wonders to recite.—WRIGHT.

[2] Like one who, from Croatia come to see
Our Veronica (image long adored),
Gazes, as though content he ne'er could be—
Thus musing, while the relic is pourtray'd—
"Jesus my God, my Saviour and my Lord,
O were thy features these I see display'd?"—WRIGHT.

Quella imagine benedetta la quale Gesù Cristo lasciò a

Of these years then of disappointment and exile the *Divina Commedia* was the labour and fruit. A story in Boccaccio's life of Dante, told with some detail, implies indeed that it was begun, and some progress made in it, while Dante was yet in Florence —begun in Latin, and he quotes three lines of it— continued afterwards in Italian. This is not impossible; indeed the germ and presage of it may be traced in the *Vita Nuova*. The idealised saint is there, in all the grace of her pure and noble humbleness, the guide and safeguard of the poet's soul. She is already in glory with Mary the queen of angels. She already beholds the face of the Everblessed. And the *envoye* of the *Vita Nuova* is the promise of the *Commedia*. "After this sonnet" (in which he describes how beyond the widest sphere of heaven his love had beheld a lady receiving honour, and dazzling by her glory the unaccustomed spirit)—"After this sonnet there appeared to me a marvellous vision, in which I saw things which made me resolve not to

noi per esempio della sua bellissima figura.—*Vita Nuova*, page 353.

He speaks of the pilgrims going to Rome to see it; compare also the sonnet to the pilgrims, *Vita Nuova*, p. 355:

Deh peregrini, che pensosi andate
Forse di cosa che non v'è presente,
Venite voi di sì lontana gente,
Com' alla vista voi ne dimostrate?

speak more of this blessed one, until such time as I should be able to indite more worthily of her. And to attain to this, I study to the utmost of my power, as she truly knows. So that, if it shall be the pleasure of Him, by whom all things live, that my life continue for some years, I hope to say of her that which never hath been said of any woman. And afterwards, may it please Him, who is the Lord of kindness, that my soul may go to behold the glory of her lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who gloriously gazes on the countenance of Him, *qui est per omnia secula benedictus.*"[1] It would be wantonly violating probability and the unity of a great life, to suppose that this purpose, though transformed, was ever forgotten or laid aside. The poet knew not indeed what he was promising, what he was pledging himself to—through what years of toil and anguish he would have to seek the light and the power he had asked; in what form his high venture should be realised. But the *Commedia* is the work of no light resolve, and we need not be surprised at finding the resolve and the purpose at the outset of the poet's life. We may freely accept the key supplied by the words of the *Vita Nuova.* The spell of boyhood is never broken, through the ups and downs of life. His

[1] *Vita Nuova*, last paragraph. See *Purg.* 30; *Parad.* 30, 6, 28-33.

course of thought advances, alters, deepens, but is continuous. From youth to age, from the first glimpse to the perfect work, the same idea abides with him, "even from the flower till the grape was ripe." It may assume various changes—an image of beauty, a figure of philosophy, a voice from the other world, a type of heavenly wisdom and joy—but still it holds, in self-imposed and willing thraldom, that creative and versatile and tenacious spirit. It was the dream and hope of too deep and strong a mind to fade and come to naught—to be other than the seed of the achievement and crown of life. But with all faith in the star and the freedom of genius, we may doubt whether the prosperous citizen would have done that which was done by the man without a home. Beatrice's glory might have been sung in grand though barbarous Latin to the literati of the fourteenth century; or a poem of new beauty might have fixed the language and opened the literature of modern Italy; but it could hardly have been the *Commedia*. That belongs, in its date and its greatness, to the time when sorrow had become the poet's daily portion, and the condition of his life.

The *Commedia* is a novel and startling apparition in literature. Probably it has been felt by some, who have approached it with the reverence due to a work of such renown, that the world has been generous in

placing it so high. It seems so abnormal, so lawless, so reckless of all ordinary proprieties and canons of feeling, taste, and composition. It is rough and abrupt; obscure in phrase and allusion, doubly obscure in purpose. It is a medley of all subjects usually kept distinct: scandal of the day and transcendental science, politics and confessions, coarse satire and angelic joy, private wrongs, with the mysteries of the faith, local names and habitations of earth, with visions of hell and heaven. It is hard to keep up with the ever-changing current of feeling, to pass as the poet passes, without effort or scruple, from tenderness to ridicule, from hope to bitter scorn or querulous complaint, from high-raised devotion to the calmness of prosaic subtleties or grotesque detail. Each separate element and vein of thought has its precedent, but not their amalgamation. Many had written visions of the unseen world, but they had not blended with them their personal fortunes. St. Augustine had taught the soul to contemplate its own history, and had traced its progress from darkness to light;[1] but he had not interwoven with it the history of Italy, and the consummation of all earthly destinies. Satire was no new thing; Juvenal had given it a moral, some of the Provençal poets a political turn; St. Jerome had kindled into it fiercely and bitterly

[1] See *Convito*, 1, 2.

even while expounding the Prophets; but here it streams forth in all its violence, within the precincts of the eternal world, and alternates with the hymns of the blessed. Lucretius had drawn forth the poetry of nature and its laws; Virgil and Livy had unfolded the poetry of the Roman Empire; St. Augustine, the still grander poetry of the history of the City of God; but none had yet ventured to weave into one the three wonderful threads. And yet the scope of the Italian poet, vast and comprehensive as the issue of all things, universal as the government which directs nature and intelligence, forbids him not to stoop to the lowest caitiff he has ever despised, the minutest fact in nature that has ever struck his eye, the merest personal association which hangs pleasantly in his memory. Writing for all time, he scruples not to mix with all that is august and permanent in history and prophecy, incidents the most transient, and names the most obscure; to waste an immortality of shame or praise on those about whom his own generation were to inquire in vain. Scripture history runs into profane; Pagan legends teach their lesson side by side with Scripture scenes and miracles; heroes and poets of heathenism, separated from their old classic world, have their place in the world of faith, discourse with Christians of Christian dogmas, and even mingle with the Saints; Virgil guides the poet

through his fear and his penitence to the gates of Paradise.

This feeling of harsh and extravagant incongruity, of causeless and unpardonable darkness, is perhaps the first impression of many readers of the *Commedia*. But probably as they read on, there will mingle with this a sense of strange and unusual grandeur, arising not alone from the hardihood of the attempt, and the mystery of the subject, but from the power and the character of the poet. It will strike them that words cut deeper than is their wont; that from that wild uncongenial imagery, thoughts emerge of singular truth and beauty. Their dissatisfaction will be chequered, even disturbed—for we can often bring ourselves to sacrifice much for the sake of a clear and consistent view—by the appearance, amid much that repels them, of proofs undeniable and accumulating of genius as mighty as it is strange. Their perplexity and disappointment may grow into distinct condemnation, or it may pass into admiration and delight; but no one has ever come to the end of the *Commedia* without feeling that if it has given him a new view and specimen of the wildness and unaccountable waywardness of the human mind, it has also added, as few other books have, to his knowledge of its feelings, its capabilities, and its grasp, and suggested larger and more serious thoughts, for which he may

be grateful, concerning that unseen world of which he is even here a member.

Dante would not have thanked his admirers for becoming apologists. Those in whom the sense of imperfection and strangeness overpowers sympathy for grandeur, and enthusiasm for nobleness, and joy in beauty, he certainly would have left to themselves. But neither would he teach any that he was leading them along a smooth and easy road. The *Commedia* will always be a hard and trying book; nor did the writer much care that it should be otherwise. Much of this is no doubt to be set down to its age; much of its roughness and extravagance, as well as of its beauty—its allegorical spirit, its frame and scenery. The idea of a visionary voyage through the worlds of pain and bliss is no invention of the poet—it was one of the commonest and most familiar mediæval vehicles of censure or warning; and those who love to trace the growth and often strange fortunes of popular ideas, or whose taste leads them to disbelieve in genius, and track the parentage of great inventions to the foolish and obscure, may find abundant materials in the literature of legends.[1] But his own age—the age which received the *Commedia* with mingled enthusiasm and wonder, and called it the Divine, was as much perplexed as we are, though probably rather

[1] *Vide* Ozanam, *Dante*, pp. 535, *sqq.* Ed. 2de.

pleased thereby than offended. That within a century after its composition, in the most famous cities and universities of Italy, Florence, Venice, Bologna, and Pisa, chairs should have been founded, and illustrious men engaged to lecture on it, is a strange homage to its power, even in that time of quick feeling; but as strange and great a proof of its obscurity. What is dark and forbidding in it was scarcely more clear to the poet's contemporaries. And he, whose last object was amusement, invites no audience but a patient and confiding one.

O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,
Desiderosi di ascoltar, seguiti
Dietro al mio legno che cantando varca,

Tornate a riveder li vostri liti:
Non vi mettete in pelago, che forse
Perdendo me rimarreste smarriti.

L' acqua ch' io prendo giammai non si corse:
Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo,
E nuove muse mi dimostran l' Orse.

Voi altri pochi, che drizzaste 'l collo
Per tempo al pan degli angeli, del quale
Vivesi qui, ma non si vien satollo,

Metter potete ben per l' alto sale
Vostro navigio, servando mio solco
Dinanzi all' acqua che ritorna eguale.

Que gloriosi che passaro a Colco,
Non s' ammiraron, come voi farete,
Quando Jason vider fatto bifolco.—*Parad.* 2.[1]

The character of the *Commedia* belongs much more, in its excellence and its imperfections, to the poet himself and the nature of his work, than to his age. That cannot screen his faults; nor can it arrogate to itself, it must be content to share, his glory. His leading idea and line of thought was

[1] O ye who fain would listen to my song,
Following in little bark full eagerly
My venturous ship, that chanting hies along.

Turn back unto your native shores again;
Tempt not the deep, lest haply losing me,
In unknown paths bewildered ye remain.

I am the first this voyage to essay;
Minerva breathes—Apollo is my guide;
And new-born muses do the Bears display.

Ye other few, who have look'd up on high
For angels' food betimes, e'en here supplied
Largely, but not enough to satisfy,—

Mid the deep ocean ye your course may take,
My track pursuing the pure waters through,
Ere reunites the quickly-closing wake.

Those glorious ones, who drove of yore their prow
To Colchos, wonder'd not as ye will do,
When they saw Jason working at the plough.

WRIGHT'S *Dante.*

much more novel then than it is now, and belongs much more to the modern than the mediæval world. The *Story of a Life*, the poetry of man's journey through the wilderness to his true country, is now in various and very different shapes as hackneyed a form of imagination, as an allegory, an epic, a legend of chivalry were in former times. Not, of course, that any time has been without its poetical feelings and ideas on the subject; and never were they deeper and more diversified, more touching and solemn, than in the ages that passed from St. Augustine and St. Gregory to St. Thomas and St. Bonaventura. But a philosophical poem, where they were not merely the colouring, but the subject, an *epos* of the soul, placed for its trial in a fearful and wonderful world, with relations to time and matter, history and nature, good and evil, the beautiful, the intelligible, and the mysterious, sin and grace, the infinite and the eternal—and having in the company and under the influences of other intelligences, to make its choice, to struggle, to succeed or fail, to gain the light, or be lost—this was a new and unattempted theme. It has been often tried since, in faith or doubt, in egotism, in sorrow, in murmuring, in affectation, sometimes in joy—in various forms, in prose and verse, completed or fragmentary, in reality or fiction, in the direct or the shadowed story, in the

Pilgrim's Progress, in Rousseau's *Confessions*, in *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust*, in the *Excursion*. It is common enough now for the poet, in the faith of human sympathy, and in the sense of the unexhausted vastness of his mysterious subject, to believe that his fellows will not see without interest and profit, glimpses of his own path and fortunes—hear from his lips the disclosure of his chief delights, his warnings, his fears—follow the many-coloured changes, the impressions and workings of a character, at once the contrast and the counterpart to their own. But it was a new path then; and he needed to be, and was, a bold man, who first opened it—a path never trod without peril, usually with loss or failure.

And certainly no great man ever made less secret to himself of his own genius. He is at no pains to rein in or to dissemble his consciousness of power, which he has measured without partiality, and feels sure will not fail him. "Fidandomi di me più che di un altro"[1]—is a reason which he assigns without reserve. We look with the distrust and hesitation of modern days, yet, in spite of ourselves, not without admiration and regret, at such frank hardihood. It was more common once than now. When the world was young, it was more natural and allowable—it was often seemly and noble. Men knew not

[1] Trusting myself more than any one else.—*Convito*, 1, 10.

their difficulties as we know them—we, to whom time, which has taught so much wisdom, has brought so many disappointments—we who have seen how often the powerful have fallen short, and the noble gone astray, and the most admirable missed their perfection. It is becoming in us to distrust ourselves —to be shy if we cannot be modest; it is but a respectful tribute to human weakness and our brethren's failures. But there was a time when great men dared to claim their greatness—not in foolish self-complacency, but in unembarrassed and majestic simplicity, in magnanimity and truth, in the consciousness of a serious and noble purpose, and of strength to fulfil it. Without passion, without elation as without shrinking, the poet surveys his superiority and his high position, as something external to him; he has no doubts about it, and affects none. He would be a coward, if he shut his eyes to what he could do; as much a trifler in displaying reserve as ostentation. Nothing is more striking in the *Commedia* than the serene and unhesitating confidence with which he announces himself the heir and reviver of the poetic power so long lost to the world—the heir and reviver of it in all its fulness. He doubts not of the judgment of posterity. One has arisen who shall throw into the shade all modern reputations, who shall bequeath to Christen-

dom the glory of that name of Poet, "che più dura e più onora," hitherto the exclusive boast of heathenism, and claim the rare honours of the laurel:

> Si rade volte, padre, se ne coglie
> Per trionfare o Cesare o poeta
> (Colpa e vergogna dell' umane voglie),
> Che partorir letizia in su la lieta
> Delfica deità dovrìa la fronda
> Peneia quando alcun di se asseta.—*Parad.* 1.[1]

He has but to follow his star to be sure of the glorious port:[2] he is the master of language; he can give fame to the dead—no task nor enterprise appals him, for whom spirits keep watch in heaven, and angels have visited the shades—"tal si partì dal cantar alleluia:"—who is Virgil's foster-child and familiar friend. Virgil bids him lay aside the last vestige of fear. Virgil is to "crown him king and priest over himself," for a higher venture than

[1] For now so rarely Poet gathers these,
Or Cæsar, winning an immortal praise
(Shame unto man's degraded energies),
That joy should to the Delphic God arise
When haply any one aspires to gain
The high reward of the Peneian prize.—WRIGHT.

[2] Brunetto Latini's Prophecy, *Inf.* 15.

[1] See the grand ending of *Purg.* 27:—

> Tratto t' ho qui con ingegno e con arte:
> Lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce:
> Fuor se' dell' erte vie, fuor se' dell' arte.

heathen poetry had dared; in Virgil's company he takes his place without diffidence, and without vain-glory, among the great poets of old—a sister soul.[1]

Poichè la voce fu restata e queta,
Vidi quattro grand' ombre a noi venire:
Sembianza avean nè trista nè lieta:

Vedi il sole che 'n fronte ti riluce.
Vede l' erbetta, i fiori, e gli arboscelli
Che questa terra sol da se produce.
Mentre che vegnon lieti gli occhi belli
Che lagrimando a te venir mi fenno,
Seder ti puoi e puoi andar tra elli.
Non aspettar mio dir più nè mio cenno:
Libero, dritto, sano è tuo arbitrio,
E fallo fora non fare a suo senno:
Perch' io te sopra te corono e mitrio.

Thus far with art and skill thy steps I've urged.
Take thou thy pleasure for thine escort now—
Forth of the steep and narrow ways emerged.
Behold the sun upon thy forehead thrown—
Behold the trees, the flowers, of every hue,
In this most happy soil spontaneous sown.
Here may'st thou stray, or rest beneath the shade,
Till, bright with joy, those eyes shall greet thy view
While erst suffused with tears, implored my aid.
No more from me expect or sign or word:
Thy will henceforth is upright, free, and sound:
To slight its impulse were a sin:—then, lord,
Be o'er thyself;—be mitred, and be crowned.—WRIGHT.

[1] *Purg.* c. 21.

Così vidi adunar la bella scuola
Di quel signor dell' altissimo canto
Che sovra gli altri come aquila vola.
Da ch' ebber ragionato insieme alquanto
Volsersi a me con salutevol cenno
E 'l mio maestro sorrise di tanto.
E più d' onore ancora assai mi fenno :
Ch' essi mi fecer della loro schiera,
Sì ch' io fui sesto tra cotanto senno.—*Inf.* 4.[1]

This sustained magnanimity and lofty self-reliance, which never betrays itself, is one of the main elements in the grandeur of the *Commedia.* It is an imposing spectacle to see such fearlessness, such freedom and such success in an untried path, amid unprepared materials and rude instruments, models

Closed had the voice—when in composed array
Four mighty shades approaching I survey'd ; —
Nor joy, nor sorrow did their looks betray.

. . . . .

Assembled thus, was offered to my sight
The school of him, the Prince of poetry,
Who, eagle-like, o'er others takes his flight.
When they together had conversed awhile,
They turned to me with salutation bland,
Which from my master drew a friendly smile :
And greater glory still they bade me share,
Making me join their honourable band—
The sixth united to such genius rare.—WRIGHT

scanty and only half understood, powers of language still doubtful and suspected, the deepest and strongest thought still confined to unbending forms and the harshest phrase; exact and extensive knowledge, as yet far out of reach; with no help from time, which familiarises all things, and of which, manner, elaboration, judgment, and taste, are the gifts and inheritance; to see the poet, trusting to his eye "which saw everything,"[1] and his searching and creativ[illegible] venture undauntedly into all regions of thoug[illegible] feeling, to draw thence a picture of the gove[illegible] of the universe.

But such greatness had to endure its price and its counterpoise. Dante was alone,—except in his visionary world, solitary and companionless. The blind Greek had his throng of listeners; the blind Englishman his home and the voices of his daughters; Shakespeare had his free associates of the stage; Goethe, his correspondents, a court, and all Germany to applaud. Not so Dante. The friends of his youth are already in the region of spirits, and meet him there—Casella, Forese;—Guido Cavalcanti will soon be with them. In this upper world he thinks and writes as a friendless man—to whom all that he had held dearest was either lost or embittered; he thinks and writes for himself.

[1] "Dante che tutto vedea."—*Sacchetti*, Nov. 114.

And so he is his own law; he owns no tribunal of opinion or standard of taste, except among the great dead. He hears them exhort him to "let the world talk on—to stand like a tower unshaken by the winds."[1] He fears to be "a timid friend to truth,"—"to lose life among those who shall call this present time antiquity."[2] He belongs to no party. He is

[1] *Purg.* 5.

[2] La luce in che rideva il mio tesoro
Ch' io trovai lì, si fe' prima corrusca,
Quale a raggio di sole specchio d'oro;
Indi rispose: coscienza fusca
O della propria o dell' altrui vergogna
Pur sentirà la tua parola brusca;
Ma nondimen, rimossa ogni menzogna,
Tutta tua vision fa manifesta,
E lascia pur grattar dov' è la rogna:
Che se la voce tua sarà molesta
Nel primo gusto, vital nutrimento
Lascerà poi quando sarà digesta.
Questo tuo grido farà come vento
Che le più alte cime più percuote:
E ciò non fia d' onor poco argomento.
Però ti son mostrate, in queste ruote,
Nel monte, e nella valle dolorosa,
Pur l' anime che son di fama note.
Che l' animo di quel ch' ode non posa,
Nè ferma fede, per esempio ch' aja
La sua radice incognito e nascosa,
Nè per altro argumento che non paja.—*Parad.* 17.

his own arbiter of the beautiful and the becoming; his own judge over right and injustice, innocence and guilt. He has no followers to secure, no school to humour, no public to satisfy; nothing to guide him, and nothing to consult, nothing to bind him, nothing to fear, out of himself. In full trust in heart and will, in his sense of truth, in his teeming brain, he gives himself free course. If men have idolised the

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The light so dear to me, whence smiles were fl
Assumed at first a garb of livelier flame,
Like golden mirror, in the sunset glowing:
Then answered me: "The conscience that is
Or with its own, or with another's shame,
May not the sharpness of your words abide:
Nevertheless, each false disguise removed,
Be all the vision fully manifested;
And let him wince who feels himself reproved;
For if thy words be deemed a harsh repast,
When tasted first, yet still, when well digested,
A wholesome food shall they afford at last.
This thy reproof shall like the wind be found,
Which chiefly doth the loftiest heights assail;
And hence a greater glory shall redound.
Wherefore no spirits here to thee are shown,
Or in the mount, or in the dolorous vale,
Save those whose names and characters are known.
For he who hears thee, will not be inclined
To give full credence, and to rest secure,
If the example brought before his mind
Be based on root ignoble or obscure."—WRIGHT.

worthless, and canonised the base, he reverses their award without mercy, and without apology; if they have forgotten the just because he was obscure, he remembers him: if "Monna Berta and Ser Martino,"[1] the wimpled and hooded gossips of the day, with their sage company, have settled it to their own satisfaction that Providence cannot swerve from their general rules, cannot save where they have doomed, or reject [redacted]hey have approved—he both fears more and [redacted]re. Deeply reverent to the judgment of the [redacted]t, reverent to the persons whom they have [redacted]lised for good and even for evil, in his own [redacted]ares for no man's person and no man's judg- And he shrinks not from the auguries and forecastings of his mind about their career and fate. Men reasoned rapidly in those days on such subjects, and without much scruple; but not with his deliberate and discriminating sternness. The most popular and honoured names in Florence,

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[1] Non creda Monna Berta e Ser Martino
Per vedere un furare, altro offerere,
Vederli dentro al consiglio divino:
Che quel può surger, e quel può cadere.—*Parad.* 13.

Let not Sir Martin or Dame Bertha say—
Seeing one steal, another sacrifice—
That they have looked into the judgment day:
For still the one may fall, the other rise.—WRIGHT

Farinata e 'l Tegghiaio, che fur sì degni,
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, e 'l Mosca
E gli altri, ch' a ben far poser gl' ingegni ;[1]

have yet the damning brand: no reader of the *Inferno* can have forgotten the shock of that terrible reply to the poet's questionings about their fate:

Ei son tra le anime piu nere.—*Inf.* 6.[2]

If he is partial, it is no vulgar partiality: friendship and old affection do not venture to exempt from its fatal doom the sin of his famous master, Brunetto Latini;[3] nobleness and great deeds, a kindred character and common wrongs, are not enough to redeem Farinata; and he who could tell her story bowed to the eternal law, and dared not save Francesca. If he condemns by a severer rule than that of the world, he absolves with fuller faith in the possibilities of grace. Many names of whom history has recorded no good, are marked by him for bliss; yet not with-

[1] Tegghiaio, Farinata, names of worth,
And Rusticucci, Mosca, with the rest,
Who bent their minds to working good on earth.
"Mid blacker souls," he said, "they're doomed to dwell."
WRIGHT

[3] Chè in la mente m' è fitta, ed or m' accuora,
La cara buona imagine paterna.—Inf. 15.
For still, deep fixed within my memory
Lives your paternal image, good and dear.—WRIGHT.

out full respect for justice. The penitent of the last hour is saved, but he suffers loss. Manfred's soul is rescued; mercy had accepted his tears, and forgiven his great sins; and the excommunication of his enemy did not bar his salvation:

> Per lor maladizion sì non si perde
> Che non possa tornar l' eterno amore
> Mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde.—*Purg.* 3.[1]

Yet his sin, though pardoned, was to keep him for long years from the perfection of heaven.[2] And with the same independence with which he assigns their fate, he selects his instances—instances which are to be the types of character and its issues. No man ever owned more unreservedly the fascination of greatness, its sway over the imagination and the heart; no one prized more the grand harmony and sense of fitness which there is, when the great man and the great office are joined in one, and reflect each other's greatness. The famous and great of all ages are gathered in the poet's vision; the great names

[1] But their fell curses cannot fix our doom,
Nor stay the Eternal Love from His intent,
While Hope remaining bears her verdant bloom.

[2] Charles of Anjou, his Guelf conqueror, is placed above him, in the valley of the kings (*Purg.* 7), "Colui dal maschio naso," —notwithstanding the charges afterwards made against him. (*Purg.* 20).

even of fable—Geryon and the giants, the Minotaur and Centaurs, and the heroes of Thebes and Troy. But not the great and famous only: this is too narrow, too conventional a sphere; it is not real enough. He felt, what the modern world feels so keenly, that wonderful histories are latent in the inconspicuous paths of life, in the fugitive incidents of the hour, among the persons whose faces we have seen. The Church had from the first been witness to the deep interest of individual life. The rising taste for novels showed that society at large was beginning to be alive to it. And it is this feeling—that behind the veil there may be grades of greatness but nothing insignificant—that led Dante to refuse to restrict himself to the characters of fame. He will associate with them the living men who have stood round him; they are part of the same company with the greatest. That they have interested him, touched him, moved his indignation or pity, struck him as examples of great vicissitude or of a perfect life, have pleased him, loved him—this is enough why they should live in his poem as they have lived to him. He chooses at will; history, if it has been negligent at the time about those whom he thought worthy of renown, must be content with its loss. He tells their story, or touches them with a word like the most familiar names, according as he pleases. The obscure highway

robber, the obscure betrayer of his sister's honour—Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo, and Caccianimico—are ranked, not according to their obscurity, but according to the greatness of their crimes, with the famous conquerors, and "scourges of God," and seducers of the heroic age, Pyrrhus and Attila, and the great Jason of "royal port, who sheds no tear in his torments."[1] He earns as high praise from Virgil for his curse on the furious wrath of the old frantic Florentine burgher, as if he had cursed the disturber of the world's peace.[2] And so in the realms of joy, among the faithful accomplishers of the highest trusts, kings and teachers of the nations, founders of orders, sainted empresses, appear those whom, though the world had forgotten or misread them, the poet had enshrined in his familiar thoughts, for their sweetness, their gentle goodness, their nobility of soul; the penitent, the nun, the old crusading ancestor, the pilgrim who had deserted the greatness which he had created, the brave logician, who "syllogised unpalatable truths" in the Quartier Latin of Paris.[3]

There is small resemblance in all this—this

[1] See the magnificent picture, *Inf.* 18. [2] *Ibid.* 8.

[3] Cunizza, Piccarda, Cacciaguida, Roméo. (*Parad.* 9, 3, 15, 6, 10).

—— La luce eterna di Sigieri
Che leggendo nel vico degli Strami
Sillogizzò invidiosi veri—*Parad.* 10.

arbitrary and imperious tone, this range of ideas, feelings, and images, this unshackled freedom, this harsh reality—to the dreamy gentleness of the *Vita Nuova*, or even the staid argumentation of the more mature *Convito*. The *Vita Nuova* is all self-concentration—a brooding, not unpleased, over the varying tides of feeling, which are little influenced by the world without; where every fancy, every sensation, every superstition of the lover is detailed with the most whimsical subtlety. The *Commedia*, too, has its tenderness—and that more deep, more natural, more true, than the poet had before adapted to the traditionary formulæ of the "Courts of Love,"—the eyes of Beatrice are as bright, and the "conquering light of her smile;"[1] they still culminate, but they are not alone, in the poet's heaven. And the professed subject of the *Commedia* is still Dante's own story and life; he still makes himself the central point. And steeled as he is by that high and hard experience of which his poem is the projection and type—"Ben

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Sigieri! dear and everlasting light;
Who in the Street of Straw as erst he taught,
Raised by the truths he told, invidious spite:—

in company with St. Thomas Aquinas, in the sphere of the Sun. Ozanam gives a few particulars of this forgotten professor of the "Rue du Fouarre," pp. 320-323.

[1] Vincendo me col lume d'un sorriso.—*Parad.* 18.

tetragono ai colpi di ventura"—a stern and brief-spoken man, set on objects, and occupied with a theme, lofty and vast as can occupy man's thoughts, he still lets escape ever and anon some passing avowal of delicate sensitiveness,[1] lingers for a moment on

[1] For instance, his feeling of distress at gazing at the blind, who were not aware of his presence—

A me pareva andando fare oltraggio
Vedendo altrui, non essendo veduto :—*Purg.* 13.

To me it seemed a want of courtesy,
Unseen myself, in other's face to peer.

and of shame, at being tempted to listen to a quarrel between two lost spirits :

Ad ascoltarli er' io del tutto fisso,
Quando 'l Maestro mi disse : or pur mira,
Che per poco è, che teco non mi risso.
Quando io 'l senti' a me parlar con ira
Volsimi verso lui con tal vergogna,
Ch' ancor per la memoria mi si gira, etc.—*Inf.* 30.

Listening I stood intent, with all my mind,
When unto me the master said ; Take heed ;
To quarrel with thee I am much inclined.
When I perceived him speak in angry strain,
I turned to him with such remorse, I deem
My mind for aye the impression will retain.

and the burst,

O dignitosa coscienza e netta,
Come t' è picciol fallo amaro morso.—*Purg.* 3.

O noble conscience, upright and refined,
How slight a fault inflicts a bitter sting.—WRIGHT.

some indulged self-consciousness, some recollection of his once quick and changeful mood—"io che son trasmutabil per tutte guise"[1]—or half playfully alludes to the whispered name of a lady,[2] whose pleasant courtesy has beguiled a few days of exile. But he is no longer spell-bound and entangled in fancies of his own weaving—absorbed in the unprofitable contemplation of his own internal sensations. The man is indeed the same, still a Florentine, still metaphysical, still a lover. He returns to the haunts and images of youth, to take among them his poet's crown; but "with other voice and other garb,"[3] a penitent and a prophet—with larger thoughts, wider sympathies, freer utterance; sterner and fiercer, yet nobler and more genuine in his tenderness—as one whom trial has made serious and keen and intolerant of evil, but not sceptical or callous; yet with the impressions and memories of a very different scene from his old day-dreams.

After that it was the pleasure of the citizens of that fairest and most famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth from her most sweet bosom (wherein I had been nourished up to the maturity of my life, and in which, with all peace to her, I long with all my heart to rest my weary soul, and finish the time which is given me), I have passed through almost all the regions to which

[1] *Parad.* 5, [2] *Purg.* 24, [3] *Parad.* 25.

this language reaches, a wanderer, almost a beggar, displaying, against my will, the stroke of fortune, which is ofttimes unjustly wont to be imputed to the person stricken. Truly, I have been a ship without a sail or helm, carried to divers harbours and gulfs and shores by that parching wind which sad poverty breathes; and I have seemed vile in the eyes of many, who perchance, from some fame, had imagined of me in another form; in the sight of whom not only did my presence become nought, but every work of mine less prized, both what had been and what was to be wrought.—*Convito*, Tr. i. c. 3.

Thus proved, and thus furnished—thus independent and confident, daring to trust his instinct and genius in what was entirely untried and unusual, he entered on his great poem, to shadow forth, under the figure of his own conversion and purification, not merely how a single soul rises to its perfection, but how this visible world, in all its phases of nature, life, and society, is one with the invisible, which borders on it, actuates, accomplishes, and explains it. It is this vast plan—to take into his scope, not the soul only in its struggles and triumph, but all that the soul finds itself engaged with in its course; the accidents of the hour, and of ages past; the real persons, great and small, apart from and without whom it cannot think or act; the material world, its theatre and home—it is this which gives so many various sides to the *Commedia*, which makes it so novel and strange.

It is not a mere personal history, or a pouring forth of feeling, like the *Vita Nuova*, though he is himself the mysterious voyager, and he opens without reserve his actual life and his heart; he speaks, indeed, in the first person, yet he is but a character of the drama, and in great part of it with not more of distinct personality than in that paraphrase of the penitential Psalms, in which he has preluded so much of the *Commedia*. Yet the *Commedia* is not a pure allegory; it admits, and makes use of the allegorical, but the laws of allegory are too narrow for it; the real in it is too impatient of the veil, and breaks through in all its hardness and detail, into what is most shadowy. History is indeed viewed not in its ephemeral look, but under the light of God's final judgments; in its completion, not in its provisional and fragmentary character; viewed therefore but in faith; but its issues, which in this confused scene we ordinarily contemplate in the gross, the poet brings down to detail and individuals; he faces and grasps the tremendous thought that the very men and women whom we see and speak to, are now the real representatives of sin and goodness, the true actors in that scene which is so familiar to us as a picture—unflinching and terrible heart, he endures to face it in its most harrowing forms. But he wrote not for sport, nor to give poetic pleasure; he wrote to warn;

the seed of the *Commedia* was sown in tears, and reaped in misery; and the consolations which it offers are awful as they are real.

Thus, though he throws into symbol and image what can only be expressed by symbol and image, we can as little forget, in reading him, this real world in which we live, as we can in one of Shakespeare's plays. It is not merely that the poem is crowded with real personages, most of them having the single interest to us of being real. But all that is associated with man's history and existence is interwoven with the main course of thought—all that gives character to life, all that gives it form and feature, even to quaintness, all that occupies the mind, or employs the hand—speculation, science, arts, manufactures, monuments, scenes, customs, proverbs, ceremonies, games, punishments, attitudes of men, habits of living creatures. The wildest and most unearthly imaginations, the most abstruse thoughts take up into, and incorporate with themselves the forcible and familiar impressions of our mother earth, and do not refuse the company and aid even of the homeliest.

This is not mere poetic ornament, peculiarly, profusely, or extravagantly employed. It is one of the ways in which his dominant feeling expresses itself—spontaneous and instinctive in each several

instance of it, but the kindling and effluence of deliberate thought, and attending on a clear purpose —the feeling of the real and intimate connexion between the objects of sight and faith. It is not that he sees in one the simple counterpart and reverse of the other, or sets himself to trace out universally their mutual correspondences; he has too strong a sense of the reality of this familiar life to reduce it merely to a shadow and type of the unseen. What he struggles to express in countless ways, with all the resources of his strange and gigantic power, is, that this world and the next are both equally real, and both one—parts, however different, of one whole. The world to come we know but in "a glass darkly"; man can only think and imagine of it in images, which he knows to be but broken and faint reflections: but this world we know, not in outline, and featureless idea, but by name, and face, and shape, by place and person, by the colours and forms which crowd over its surface, the men who people its habitations, the events which mark its moments. Detail fills the sense here, and is the mark of reality. And thus he seeks to keep alive the feeling of what that world is which he connects with heaven and hell; not by abstractions, not much by elaborate and highly-finished pictures, but by names, persons, local features, definite images. Widely and keenly has he ranged over and searched into the

world—with a largeness of mind which disdained not to mark and treasure up, along with much unheeded beauty, many a characteristic feature of nature, unnoticed because so common. All his pursuits and interests contribute to the impression, which, often instinctively it may be, he strives to produce, of the manifold variety of our life. As a man of society, his memory is full of its usages, formalities, graces, follies, fashions—of expressive motions, postures, gestures, looks—of music, of handicrafts, of the conversation of friends or associates—of all that passes, so transient, yet so keenly pleasant or distasteful, between man and man. As a traveller, he recalls continually the names and scenes of the world;—as a man of speculation, the secrets of nature—the phenomena of light, the theory of the planets' motions, the idea and laws of physiology. As a man of learning, he is filled with the thoughts and recollections of ancient fable and history; as a politician, with the thoughts, prognostications, and hopes, of the history of the day; as a moral philosopher he has watched himself, his external sensations and changes, his inward passions, his mental powers, his ideas, his conscience; he has far and wide noted character, discriminated motives, classed good and evil deeds. All that the man of society, of travel, of science, of learning, the politician, the moralist, could gather, is used at will in the great

poetic structure; but all converges to the purpose, and is directed by the intense feeling of the theologian, who sees this wonderful and familiar scene melting into, and ending in another yet more wonderful, but which will one day be as familiar—who sees the difficult but sure progress of the manifold remedies of the Divine government to their predestined issue; and, over all, God and His saints.

So comprehensive in interest is the *Commedia*. Any attempt to explain it, by narrowing that interest to politics, philosophy, the moral life, or theology itself, must prove inadequate. Theology strikes the key-note; but history, natural and metaphysical science, poetry, and art, each in their turn join in the harmony, independent, yet ministering to the whole. If from the poem itself we could be for a single moment in doubt of the reality and dominant place of religion in it, the plain-spoken prose of the *Convito* would show how he placed "the Divine Science, full of all peace, and allowing no strife of opinions and sophisms, for the excellent certainty of its subject, which is God," in single perfection above all other sciences, "which are, as Solomon speaks, but queens, or concubines, or maidens; but she is the 'Dove,' and the 'perfect one'—'Dove,' because without stain of strife—'perfect,' because perfectly she makes us behold the truth, in which our soul stills itself and is

at rest." But the same passage[1] shows likewise how he viewed all human knowledge and human interests, as holding their due place in the hierarchy of wisdom, and among the steps of man's perfection. No account of the *Commedia* will prove sufficient, which does not keep in view, first of all, the high moral purpose and deep spirit of faith with which it was written, and then the wide liberty of materials and means which the poet allowed himself in working out his design.

Doubtless, his writings have a political aspect. The "great Ghibelline poet" is one of Dante's received synonyms; of his strong political opinions, and the importance he attached to them, there can be no doubt. And he meant his poem to be the vehicle of them, and the record to all ages of the folly and selfishness with which he saw men governed. That he should take the deepest interest in the goings on of his time, is part of his greatness; to suppose that he stopped at them, or that he subordinated to political objects or feelings all the other elements of his poem, is to shrink up that greatness into very narrow limits. Yet this has been done by men of mark and ability, by Italians, by men who read the *Commedia* in their own mother-tongue. It has been maintained as a satisfactory account of it—maintained with great labour and pertinacious ingenuity—that

[1] *Convito*, Tr. 2, c. 14, 15.

Dante meant nothing more by his poem than the conflicts and ideal triumph of a political party. The hundred cantos of that vision of the universe are but a manifesto of the Ghibelline propaganda, designed, under the veil of historic images and scenes, to insinuate what it was dangerous to announce; and Beatrice, in all her glory and sweetness, is but a specimen of the jargon, cant, and slang of Ghibelline freemasonry. When Italians write thus, they degrade the greatest name of their country to a depth of laborious imbecility, to which the trifling of schoolmen and academicians is as nothing. It is to solve the enigma of Dante's works, by imagining for him a character in which it is hard to say which predominates, the pedant, mountebank, or infidel. After that we may read Voltaire's sneers with patience, and even enter with gravity on the examination of Father Hardouin's Historic Doubts. The fanaticism of an outraged liberalism, produced by centuries of injustice and despotism, is but a poor excuse for such perverse blindness.[1]

Dante was not a Ghibelline, though he longed for the interposition of an Imperial power. Historically

[1] In the *Remains of Arthur Henry Hallam* is a paper, in which he examines and disposes of this theory with a courteous and forbearing irony, which would have deepened probably into something more, on thinking over it a second time.

he did not belong to the Ghibelline party. It is true that he forsook the Guelfs, with whom he had been brought up, and that the White Guelfs, with whom he was expelled from Florence, were at length merged and lost in the Ghibelline party;[1] and he acted with them for a time.[2] But no words can be stronger than those in which he disjoins himself from that "evil and foolish company," and claims his independence—

A te fia bello
Averti fatto parte per te stesso.—Parad. 17.[3]

And it is not easy to conceive a Ghibelline partisan putting into the mouth of Justinian, the type of law and empire, a general condemnation of his party as heavy as that of their antagonists,—the crime of having betrayed, as the Guelfs had resisted, the great symbol of public right—

Omai puoi giudicar di que' cotali
Ch' io accusai di sopra, e de' lor falli
Che son cagion di tutti i vostri mali.
L' uno al pubblico segno i gigli gialli
Oppone, e *quel s' appropria l' altro a parte,*
Sì ch' è forte a veder qual più si falli.

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[1] *Dino Comp.* pp. 89-91.

[2] His name appears among the White delegates in 1307. Pelli. p. 117.

[3] So will a greater fame redound to thee,
To have formed a party by thyself alone.

Faccian li Ghibellin, faccian lor arte
Sott' altro segno; che mal segue quello
Sempre chi la giustizia e lui diparte.—Parad. 6.[1]

And though, as the victim of the Guelfs of Florence, he found refuge among Ghibelline princes, he had friends among Guelfs also. His steps and his tongue were free to the end. And in character and feeling, in his austerity, his sturdiness and roughness, his intolerance of corruption and pride, his strongly-marked devotional temper, he was much less a Ghibelline than like one of those stern Guelfs who hailed Savonarola.

But he had a very decided and complete political theory, which certainly was not Guelf; and, as parties then were, it was not much more Ghibelline. Most assuredly no set of men would have more vigorously resisted the attempt to realise his theory, would have joined more heartily with all immediate opponents —Guelfs, Black, White, and Green, or even Boniface

[1] Now may'st form an estimate of those
Whom I before accused; and clearly scan
How great their crimes, the cause of all your woes.
This 'gainst the public banner doth array
The yellow lilies—this a partisan
Would make it;—which most wrong, 'tis hard to say.
Let, let the Ghibellines pursue their arts
Beneath some other ensign; for accurst
Is he who it and equity disparts.—WRIGHT.

VIII.,—to keep out such an emperor as Dante imagined, than the Ghibelline nobles and potentates.

Dante's political views were a dream; though a dream based on what had been, and an anticipation of what was, in part at least, to come. It was a dream in the Middle Ages, in divided and republican Italy, the Italy of cities—of a real and national government, based on justice and law. It was the dream of a real *state*. He imagined that the Roman Empire had been one great state; he persuaded himself that Christendom might be such. He was wrong in both instances; but in this case, as in so many others, he had already caught the spirit and ideas of a far-distant future; and the political organisation of modern times, so familiar to us that we cease to think of its exceeding wonder, is the practical confirmation, though in a form very different from what he imagined, of the depth and farsightedness of those expectations which are in outward form so chimerical—"*i miei non falsi errori.*"

He had studied the "infinite disorders of the world" in one of their most unrestrained scenes, the streets of an Italian republic. Law was powerless, good men were powerless, good intentions came to naught; neither social habits nor public power could resist, when selfishness chose to have its way. The Church was indeed still the salt of the nations; but it

had once dared and achieved more; it had once been the only power which ruled them. And this it could do no longer. If strength and energy had been enough to make the Church's influence felt on government, there was a Pope who could have done it—a man who was undoubtedly the most wondered at and admired of his age, whom friend or foe never characterised, without adding the invariable epithet of his greatness of soul—the "*magnanimus peccator*,"[1] whose Roman grandeur in meeting his unworthy fate fascinated into momentary sympathy even Dante.[2] But

[1] Benvenuto da Imola.

[2] Veggio in Alagna entrar lo fiordaliso,
E nel vicario suo Cristo esser catto;
Veggiolo un' altra volta esser deriso;
Veggio rinnovellar l'aceto e 'l fele,
E tra vivi ladroni essere anciso.—*Purg.* 20.

Entering Alagna, to the fleur-de-lis,
And in his Vicar Christ a captive led,
I see Him mocked a second time;—again
The vinegar and gall produced I see;
And Christ Himself 'twixt living robbers slain.

WRIGHT.

G. Villani, viii. 63. Come magnanimo e valente, disse, *Dacchè per tradimento, come Gesù Cristo, voglio esser preso e mi conviene morire, almeno voglio morire come Papa;* e di presente si fece parare dell' ammanto di San Piero, e colla corona di Constantino in capo, e colle chiavi e croce in mano, e in su la sedia papale si pose a sedere, e giunto a lui Sciarra e gli altri suoi nimici, con villane parole lo scherniro.

among the things which Boniface VIII. could not do, even if he cared about it, was the maintaining peace and law in Italian towns. And while this great political power was failing, its correlative and antagonist was paralysed also. "Since the death of Frederic II.," says Dante's contemporary, "the fame and recollections of the empire were wellnigh extinguished."[1] Italy was left without government—"come nave senza nocchiero in gran tempesta"—to the mercies of her tyrants:

> Che le terre d'Italia tutte piene
> Son di tiranni, e un Marcel diventa
> Ogni villan, che parteggiando viene.—*Purg.* 6.[2]

In this scene of violence and disorder, with the Papacy gone astray, the empire debased and impotent, the religious orders corrupted, power meaning lawlessness, the well-disposed become weak and cowardly, religion neither guide nor check to society, but only the consolation of its victims—Dante was bold and hopeful enough to believe in the Divine appointment, and in the possibility, of law and government—of a state. In his philosophy the institutions which provide for man's peace and liberty in this life are part

[1] *Dino Compagni*, p. 135.

[2] That full of tyrants is Italia's land;
And Marcellus straight accounted is
Each peasant vile that wields a factious hand.—WRIGHT.

of God's great order for raising men to perfection ;— not indispensable, yet ordinary parts ; having their important place, though but for the present time ; and though imperfect, real instruments of His moral government. He could not believe it to be the intention of Providence that on the introduction of higher hopes and the foundation of a higher society, civil society should collapse and be left to ruin, as henceforth useless or prejudicial in man's trial and training. He saw the significant intimations of nature, that law and its results, justice, peace, and stability, ought to be and might be realised among men ; he could not think that they had lost their meaning and faded away before the announcement of a kingdom not of this world. And if the perfection of civil society had not been superseded by the Church, it had become clear, if events were to be read as signs, that she was not intended to supply its political offices and functions. She had taught, elevated, solaced, blessed, not only individual souls, but society ; she had for a time even governed it : but though her other powers remained, she could govern it no longer. Failure had made it certain that, in his strong and quaint language, "*Virtus authorizandi regnum nostræ mortalitatis est contra naturam ecclesiæ ; ergo non est de numero virtutum suarum.*"[1]

[1] The power to grant authority in that which is the king-

Another and distinct organisation was required for this, unless the temporal order was no longer worthy the attention of Christians.

This is the idea of the *De Monarchia;* and though it holds but a place in the great scheme of the *Commedia,* it is prominent there also—an idea seen but in a fantastic shape, encumbered and confused with most grotesque imagery, but the real idea of polity and law, which the experience of modern Europe has attained to.

He found in clear outline in the Greek philosophy the theory of merely human society; and raising its end and purpose, "*finem totius humanæ civilitatis,*" to a height and dignity which Heathens could not forecast, he adopted it in its more abstract and ideal form. He imagined a single authority, unselfish, inflexible, irresistible, which could make all smaller tyrannies to cease, and enable every man to live in peace and liberty, so that he lived in justice. It is simply what each separate state of Christendom has by this time more or less perfectly achieved. The theoriser of the Middle Ages could conceive of its accomplishment only in one form, as grand as it was impossible—a universal monarchy.

dom of our mortal state is contrary to the nature of the Church. Therefore it is not in the number of the Church's powers. *De Monarch.* lib. iii. p. 188, Ed. Fraticelli.

But he did not start from an abstraction. He believed that history attested the existence of such a monarchy. The prestige of the Roman Empire was then strong. Europe still lingers on the idea, and cannot even yet bring itself to give up its part in that great monument of human power. But in the Middle Ages the empire was still believed to exist. It was the last greatness which had been seen in the world, and the world would not believe that it was over. Above all, in Italy, a continuity of lineage, of language, of local names, and in part of civilisation and law, forbad the thought that the great Roman people had ceased to be. Florentines and Venetians boasted that they were Romans: the legends which the Florentine ladies told to their maidens at the loom were tales of their mother city, Rome. The Roman element, little understood, but profoundly reverenced and dearly cherished, was dominant; the conductor of civilisation, and enfolding the inheritance of all the wisdom, experience, feeling, art, of the past, it elevated, even while it overawed, oppressed, and enslaved. A deep belief in Providence added to the intrinsic grandeur of the empire a sacred character. The flight of the eagle has been often told and often sung; but neither in Livy nor Virgil, Gibbon nor Bossuet, with intenser sympathy or more kindred power, than in those rushing and unflagging verses in

which the Middle-Age poet hears the imperial legislator relate the fated course of the "sacred sign," from the day when Pallas died for it till it accomplished the vengeance of heaven in Judæa, and afterwards, under Charlemagne, smote down the enemies of the Church.[1]

The following passage, from the *De Monarchia*, will show the poet's view of the Roman Empire, and its office in the world:

To the reasons above alleged, a memorable experience brings confirmation: I mean that state of mankind which the Son of God, when He would for man's salvation take man upon Him, either waited for, or ordered when so He willed. For if from the fall of our first parents, which was the starting-point of all our wanderings, we retrace the various dispositions of men and their times, we shall not find at any time, except under the divine monarch Augustus, when a perfect monarchy existed, that the world was everywhere quiet. And that then mankind was happy in the tranquillity of universal peace, this all writers of history, this famous poets, this even the Scribe of the meekness of Christ has deigned to attest. And lastly, Paul has called that most blessed condition, the fulness of time. Truly time, and the things of time, were full, for no mystery of our felicity then lacked its minister. But how the world has gone on from the time when that seamless robe was first torn by the claws of covetousness, we may read, and would that we might not

[1] *Parad.* c. 6.

also see. O race of men, by how great storms and losses, by how great shipwrecks hast thou of necessity been vexed since, transformed into a beast of many heads, thou hast been struggling different ways, sick in understanding, equally sick in heart. The higher intellect, with its invincible reasons, thou reckest not of; nor of the inferior, with its eye of experience; nor of affection, with the sweetness of divine suasion, when the trumpet of the Holy Ghost sounds to thee—"Behold, how good is it, and how pleasant, brethren, to dwell together in unity." —*De Monarch.* lib. i. p. 54.

Yet this great Roman Empire existed still unimpaired in name—not unimposing even in what really remained of it. Dante, to supply a want, turned it into a theory—a theory easy to smile at now, but which contained and was a beginning of unknown or unheeded truth. What he yearns after is the predominance of the principle of justice in civil society. That, if it is still imperfect, is no longer a dream in our day; but experience had never realised it to him, and he takes refuge in tentative and groping theory. The divinations of the greatest men have been vague and strange, and none have been stranger than those of the author of the *De Monarchia.* The second book, in which he establishes the title of the Roman people to Universal Empire, is as startling a piece of mediæval argument as it would be easy to find.

As when we cannot attain to look upon a cause, we

commonly wonder at a new effect, so when we know the cause, we look down with a certain derision on those who remain in wonder. And I indeed wondered once how the Roman people had, without any resistance, been set over the world; and looking at it superficially, I thought that they had obtained this by no right, but by mere force of arms. But when I fixed deeply the eyes of my mind on it, and by most effectual signs knew that Divine Providence had wrought this, wonder departed, and a certain scornful contempt came in its stead, when I perceived the nations raging against the pre-eminence of the Roman people:—when I see the people imagining a vain thing, as I once used to do; when, moreover, I grieve over kings and princes agreeing in this only, to be against their Lord and his anointed Roman Emperor. Wherefore in derision, not without a certain grief, I can cry out, for that glorious people and for Cæsar, with him who cried in behalf of the Prince of Heaven, "Why did the nations rage, and the people imagine vain things; the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were joined in one against the Lord and his anointed." But (because natural love suffers not derision to be of long duration, but, like the summer sun, which, scattering the morning mists, irradiates the east with light, so prefers to pour forth the light of correction) therefore to break the bonds of the ignorance of such kings and rulers, to show that the human race is free from *their* yoke, I will exhort myself, in company with the most holy Prophet, taking up his following words, "Let us break their bonds, and cast away from us their yoke."—*De Monarch.* lib. ii. p. 58.

And to prove this pre-eminence of right in the

Roman people, and their heirs, the Emperors of Christendom, he appeals not merely to the course of Providence, to their high and noble ancestry, to the blessings of their just and considerate laws, to their unselfish guardianship of the world — "*Romanum imperium de fonte nascitur pietatis;*" — not merely to their noble examples of private virtue, self-devotion, and public spirit—"those most sacred victims of the Decian house, who laid down their lives for the public weal, as Livy—not as *they* deserved, but as *he* was able—tells to their glory; and that unspeakable sacrifice of freedom's sternest guardians, the Catos;" not merely to the "judgment of God" in that great duel and wager of battle for empire, in which heaven declared against all other champions and "co-athletes"—Alexander, Pyrrhus, Hannibal, and by all the formalities of judicial combat awarded the great prize to those who fought, not for love or hatred, but justice—"*Quis igitur nunc adeo obtusæ mentis est, qui non videat, sub jure duelli gloriosum populum coronam totius orbis esse lucratum?*" — not merely to arguments derived "from the principles of the Christian faith" — but to *miracles.* "The Roman empire," he says, "was, in order to its perfections, aided by the help of miracles; therefore it was willed by God; and, by consequence, both was, and is, of right." And these miracles, "proved by the testi-

mony of illustrious authorities," are the prodigies of Livy—the ancile of Numa, the geese of the Capitol, the escape of Clelia, the hail-storm which checked Hannibal.[1]

The intellectual phenomenon is a strange one. It would be less strange if Dante were arguing in the schools, or pleading for a party. But even Henry of Luxemburg cared little for such a throne as the poet wanted him to fill, much less Can Grande and the Visconti. The idea, the theory, and the argument, are of the writer's own solitary meditation. We may wonder. But there are few things more strange than the history of argument. How often has a cause or an idea turned out, in the eyes of posterity, so much better than its arguments. How often have we seen argument getting as it were into a groove, and unable to extricate itself, so as to do itself justice. The everyday cases of private experience, of men defending right conclusions on wrong or conventional grounds, or in a confused form, entangled with conclusions of a like yet different nature;—of arguments, theories, solutions, which once satisfied, satisfying us no longer on a question about which we hold the same belief—of one party unable to comprehend the arguments of another—of one section of the same

[1] *De Monarch.* lib. ii. pp. 62, 66, 78, 82, 84, 108-114, 116, 72-76.

side smiling at the defence of their common cause by another—are all reproduced on a grander scale in the history of society. There too, one age cannot comprehend another; there too it takes time to disengage, subordinate, eliminate. Truth of this sort is not the elaboration of one keen or strong mind, but of the secret experience of many; "*nihil sine ætate est, omnia tempus expectant.*"[1] But a counterpart to the *De Monarchia* is not wanting in our own day; theory has not ceased to be mighty. In warmth and earnestness, in sense of historic grandeur, in its support of a great cause and a great idea, not less than in the thought of its motto, εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, De Maistre's volume *Du Pape*, recalls the antagonist *De Monarchia;* but it recalls it not less in its bold dealing with facts, and its bold assumption of principles, though the knowledge and debates of five more busy centuries, and the experience of modern courts and revolutions, might have guarded the Piedmontese nobleman from the mistakes of the old Florentine.

But the idea of the *De Monarchia* is no key to the *Commedia.* The direct and primary purpose of the *Commedia* is surely its obvious one. It is to stamp a deep impression on the mind, of the issues of good

[1] "Nothing is without its age and date; all things wait for their time."—*Tertull.*

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and ill doing here—of the real worlds of pain and joy. To do this forcibly, it is done in detail—of course it can only be done in figure. Punishment, purification, or the fulness of consolation are, as he would think, at this very moment, the lot of all the numberless spirits who have ever lived here—spirits still living and sentient as himself: parallel with our life, they too are suffering or are at rest. Without pause or interval, in all its parts simultaneously, this awful scene is going on—the judgments of God are being fulfilled—could we but see it. It exists, it might be seen, at each instant of time, by a soul whose eyes were opened, which was carried through it. And this he imagines. It had been imagined before; it is the working out, which is peculiar to him. It is not a barren vision. His subject is, besides the eternal world, the soul which contemplates it; by sight, according to his figures—in reality, by faith. As he is led on from woe to deeper woe, then through the tempered chastisements and resignation of Purgatory to the beatific vision, he is tracing the course of the soul on earth, realising sin and weaning itself from it—of its purification and preparation for its high lot, by converse with the good and wise, by the remedies of grace, by efforts of will and love, perhaps by the dominant guidance of some single pure and holy influence, whether of person, or insti-

tution, or thought. Nor will we say but that beyond this earthly probation, he is not also striving to grasp and imagine to himself something of that awful process and training, by which, whether in or out of the flesh, the spirit is made fit to meet its Maker, its Judge, and its Chief Good.

Thus it seems that even in its main design the poem has more than one aspect; it is a picture, a figure, partially a history, perhaps an anticipation. And this is confirmed, by what the poet has himself distinctly stated, of his ideas of poetic composition. His view is expressed generally in his philosophical treatise, the *Convito;* but it is applied directly to the *Commedia*, in a letter, which, if in its present form of doubtful authenticity, without any question represents his sentiments, and the substance of which is incorporated in one of the earliest writings on the poem, Boccaccio's commentary. The following is his account of the subject of the poem:

For the evidence of what is to be said, it is to be noted, that this work is not of one single meaning only, but may be said to have many meanings ("*polysensuum*"). For the first meaning is that of the letter—another is that of things signified by the letter; the first of these is called the literal sense, the second, the allegorical or moral. This mode of treating a subject may for clearness' sake be considered in those verses of the psalm, "*In exitu Israel.*" "When Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob

from the strange people, Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion." For if we look at the *letter* only, there is here signified the going out of the children of Israel in the time of Moses—if at the *allegory* there is signified our redemption through Christ—if at the *moral* sense there is signified to us the conversion of the soul from the mourning and misery of sin to the state of grace —if at the *anagogic* sense,[1] there is signified the passing out of the holy soul from the bondage of this corruption to the liberty of everlasting glory. And these mystical meanings, though called by different names, may all be called *allegorical* as distinguished from the literal or historical sense. . . . This being considered, it is plain that there ought to be a twofold subject, concerning which the two corresponding meanings may proceed. Therefore we must consider first concerning the subject of this work as it is to be understood literally, then as it is to be considered allegorically. The subject then of the whole work, taken literally only, is the state of souls after death considered in itself. For about this, and on this, the whole work turns. But if the work be taken allegorically its subject is man, as, by his freedom of choice deserving well or ill, he is subject to the justice which rewards and punishes.[2]

The passage in the *Convito* is to the same effect; but his remarks on the *moral* and *anagogic* meaning may be quoted:

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[1] *Litera* gesta refert, quid credas *allegoria*
Moralis quid agas; quid speres *anagogia*.
De Witte's note from *Buti*.

[2] Ep. ad *Kan Grand.* § 6, 7.

The third sense is called *moral;* that it is which readers ought to go on noting carefully in writings, for their own profit and that of their disciples; as in the Gospel it may be noted when Christ went up to the mountain to be transfigured, that of the twelve Apostles he took with him only three; in which morally we may understand, that in the most secret things we ought to have but few companions. The fourth sort of meaning is called *anagogic*, that is, above our sense; and this is when we spiritually interpret a passage, which even in its literal meaning, by means of the things signified, expresses the heavenly things of everlasting glory; as may be seen in that song of the Prophet, which says that in the coming out of the people of Israel from Egypt, Judah was made holy and free; which, although it is manifestly true according to the letter, is not less true as spiritually understood; that is, that when the soul comes out of sin, it is made holy and free, in its own power.[1]

With this passage before us there can be no doubt of the meaning, however veiled, of those beautiful lines, already referred to, in which Virgil, after having conducted the poet up the steeps of Purgatory where his sins have been one by one cancelled by the ministering angels, finally takes leave of him, and bids him wait for Beatrice, on the skirts of the earthly Paradise:

Come la scala tutta sotto noi
Fu corsa e fummo in su 'l grado supremo

[1] *Convito*, Tr. 2, c. 1.

In me ficcò Virgilio gli occhi suoi,
E disse: "Il temporal fuoco, e l' eterno
Veduto hai, figlio, e se' venuto in parte
Ov' io per me più oltre non discerno.
Tratto t' ho qui con ingegno e con arte:
Lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce;
Fuor se' dell' erte vie, fuor se' dell' arte.
Vedi il sole che 'n fronte ti riluce:
Vedi l' erbetta, i fiori, e gli arboscelli
Che quella terra sol da se produce.
Mentre che vegnon lieti gli occhi belli
Che lagrimando a te venir mi fenno,
Seder ti puoi e puoi andar tra elli.
Non aspettar mio dir più nè mio cenno:
Libero, dritto, sano è tuo arbitrio,
E fallo fora non fare a suo senno:—
Perch' io te sopra te corono e mitrio."—*Purg.* c. 27.[1]

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[1] When we had run
O'er all the ladder to its topmost round,
As there we stood, on me the Mantuan fix'd
His eyes, and thus he spake: "Both fires, my son,
The temporal and the eternal, thou hast seen:
And art arrived, where of itself my ken
No further reaches. I with skill and art,
Thus far have drawn thee. Now thy pleasure take
For guide. Thou hast o'ercome the steeper way,
O'ercome the straiter. Lo! the sun, that darts
His beam upon thy forehead: lo! the herb,
The arborets and flowers, which of itself
This land pours forth profuse. Till those bright eyes
With gladness come, which, weeping, made me haste

The general meaning of the *Commedia* is clear enough. But it certainly does appear to refuse to be fitted into a connected formal scheme of interpretation. It is not a homogeneous, consistent allegory, like the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Fairy Queen*. The allegory continually breaks off, shifts its ground, gives place to other elements, or mingles with them—like a stream which suddenly sinks into the earth, and after passing under plains and mountains, reappears in a distant point, and in different scenery. We can, indeed, imagine its strange author commenting on it, and finding or marking out its prosaic substratum, with the cold-blooded precision and scholastic distinctions of the *Convito*. However, he has not done so. And of the many enigmas which present themselves, either in its structure or separate parts, the key seems hopelessly lost. The early commentators are very ingenious, but very unsatisfactory; they see where we can see, but beyond that they are as full of uncertainty as ourselves. It is in character with that solitary and haughty spirit, while touching universal

> To succour thee, thou mayest or seat thee down,
> Or wander where thou wilt. Expect no more
> Sanction of warning voice or sign from me,
> Free of thine own arbitrement to choose,
> Discreet, judicious. To distrust thy sense
> Were henceforth error. I invest thee then
> With crown and mitre, sovereign o'er thyself."—CARY.

sympathies, appalling and charming all hearts, to have delighted in his own dark sayings, which had meaning only to himself. It is true that, whether in irony, or from that quaint studious care for the appearance of literal truth, which makes him apologise for the wonders which he relates, and confirm them by an oath, "on the words of his poem,"[1] he provokes and challenges us; bids us admire "doctrine hidden under strange verses;"[2] bids us strain our eyes, for the veil is thin:

Aguzza, qui, lettor, ben l' occhi al vero:
Che il velo è ora ben tanto sottile,
Certo, che il trapassar dentro è leggiero.—*Purg.* c. 8.[3]

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[1] Sempre a quel ver, ch' ha faccia di menzogna,
De' l' uom chiuder le labbra, quanto puote,
Però che senza colpa fa vergogna.
Ma qui tacer nol posso; e per le note
Di questa *Commedia*, lettor, ti giuro
S' elle non sien di lunga grazia vote, etc.—*Inf.* 16.

That truth which bears the semblance of a lie
Should never pass the lips, if possible:—
Though crime be absent, still disgrace is nigh,
But here I needs must speak; and by the rhymes
Reader of this my Comedy, I swear,
So may they live with fame to future times.—WRIGHT.

[2] *Inf.* 9.

[3] Reader! here sharpen to the truth thy sight;
For thou with care may'st penetrate the veil,
So finely woven, and of texture slight.

But eyes are still strained in conjecture and doubt.

Yet the most certain and detailed commentary, one which should assign the exact reason for every image or allegory, and its place and connexion in a general scheme, would add but little to the charm or to the use of the poem. It is not so obscure but that every man's experience who has thought over and felt the mystery of our present life, may supply the commentary — the more ample, the wider and more various his experience, the deeper and keener his feeling. Details and links of connexion may be matter of controversy. Whether the three beasts of the forest mean definitely the vices of the time, or of Florence specially, or of the poet himself —"the wickedness of his heels, compassing him round about"— may still exercise critics and antiquaries; but that they carry with them distinct and special impressions of evil, and that they are the hindrances of man's salvation, is not doubtful. And our knowledge of the key of the allegory, where we possess it, contributes but little to the effect. We may infer from the *Convito*[1] that the eyes of Beatrice stand definitely for the *demonstrations*, and her smiles for the *persuasions* of wisdom; but the poetry of the *Paradiso* is not about demonstrations and persuasions,

[1] *Convito*, Tr. 3, c. 15.

but about looks and smiles; and the ineffable and holy calm—"*serenitatis et æternitatis afflatus*"—which pervades it, comes from its sacred truths, and holy persons, and that deep spirit of high-raised yet composed devotion, which it requires no interpreter to show us.

Figure and symbol, then, are doubtless the law of composition in the *Commedia;* but this law discloses itself very variously, and with different degrees of strictness. In its primary and most general form it is palpable, consistent, pervading. There can be no doubt that the poem is meant to be understood figuratively—no doubt of what in general it is meant to shadow forth—no doubt as to the general meaning of its parts, their connexion with each other. But in its secondary and subordinate applications, the law works—to our eye at least—irregularly, unequally, and fitfully. There can be no question that Virgil, the poet's guide, represents the purely human element in the training of the soul and of society, as Beatrice does the divine. But neither represent the whole; he does not sum up all appliances of wisdom in Virgil, nor all teachings and influences of grace in Beatrice; these have their separate figures. And both represent successively several distinct forms of their general antitypes. They have various degrees of abstractness, and narrow down, according to that order of things

to which they refer and correspond, into the special and the personal. In the general economy of the poem, Virgil stands for human wisdom in its widest sense; but he also stands for it in its various shapes, in the different parts. He is the type of human philosophy and science.[1] He is, again, more definitely, that spirit of imagination and poetry, which opens men's eyes to the glory of the visible, and the truth of the invisible; and to Italians, he is a definite embodiment of it, their own great poet, "*vates, poeta noster.*"[2] In the Christian order, he is human wisdom, dimly mindful of its heavenly origin—presaging dimly its return to God—sheltering in heathen times that "vague and unconnected family of religious truths, originally from God, but sojourning without the sanction of miracle or visible home, as pilgrims up and down the world."[3] In the political order, he is the guide of law-givers, wisdom fashioning the impulses and instincts of men into the harmony of society, contriving stability and peace, guarding justice; fit part for the poet to fill, who had sung the origin of Rome, and the justice and peace of Augustus. In the order of individual life, and the progress of the individual soul, he is the human con-

[1] "O tu ch' onori ogni scienza ed arte."—*Inf.* 4. "Quel savio gentil, che tutto seppe."—*Inf.* 7. "Il mar di tutto'l senno."—*Inf.* 8. [2] *De Monarchia.* [3] Newman's *Arians.*

science witnessing to duty, its discipline and its hopes, and with yet more certain and fearful presage, to its vindication; the human conscience seeing and acknowledging the law, but unable to confer power to fulfil it—wakened by grace from among the dead, leading the living man up to it, and waiting for its light and strength. But he is more than a figure. To the poet himself, who blends with his high argument his whole life, Virgil had been the utmost that mind can be to mind—teacher, quickener and revealer of power, source of thought, exemplar and model, never disappointing, never attained to, observed with "long study and great love:"[1]

Tu duca, tu signor, e tu maestro.—*Inf.* 2.

And towards this great master, the poet's whole soul is poured forth in reverence and affection. To Dante he is no figure, but a person—with feelings and weaknesses—overcome by the vexation, kindling into the wrath, carried away by the tenderness, of the moment. He reads his scholar's heart, takes him by the hand in danger, carries him in his arms and in his bosom, "like a son more than a companion," rebukes his unworthy curiosity, kisses him when he shows a noble spirit, asks pardon for his own mistakes. Never were the kind yet severe ways of a

[1] *Inf.* 1.

master, or the disciple's diffidence and open-heartedness, drawn with greater force, or less effort; and he seems to have been reflecting on his own affection to Virgil, when he makes Statius forget that they were both but shades :—

> Or puoi la quantitate
> Comprender dell' amor ch' a te mi scalda,
> Quando *dismento la nostra vanitate*
> *Trattando l' ombre come cosa salda.*—*Purg.* 21.[1]

And so with the poet's second guide. The great idea which Beatrice figures, though always present, is seldom rendered artificially prominent, and is often entirely hidden beneath the rush of real recollections, and the creations of dramatic power. Abstractions venture and trust themselves among realities, and for the time are forgotten. A name, a real person, a historic passage, a lament or denunciation, a tragedy of actual life, a legend of classic times, the fortunes of friends—the story of Francesca or Ugolino, the fate of Buonconte's corpse, the apology of Pier delle Vigne, the epitaph of Madonna Pia, Ulysses's western voyage, the march of Roman history—appear and absorb for themselves all interest: or else it is a philosophical

[1] —See now how brightly beaming
Towards thee the fire of my affection springs,
When I forget our airy essence, deeming
Of empty shadows, as substantial things.—WRIGHT

speculation, or a theory of morality, or a case of conscience—not indeed alien from the main subject, yet independent of the allegory, and not translatable into any new meaning—standing on their own ground, worked out each according to its own law; but they do not disturb the main course of the poet's thought, who grasps and paints each detail of human life in its own peculiarity, while he sees in each a significance and interest beyond itself. He does not stop in each case to tell us so, but he makes it felt. The tale ends, the individual disappears, and the great allegory resumes its course. It is like one of those great musical compositions which alone seem capable of adequately expressing, in a limited time, a course of unfolding and change, in an idea, a career, a life, a society—where one great thought predominates, recurs, gives colour and meaning, and forms the unity of the whole, yet passes through many shades and transitions; is at one time definite, at another suggestive and mysterious; incorporating and giving free place and play to airs and melodies even of an alien cast; striking off abruptly from its expected road, but without ever losing itself, without breaking its true continuity, or failing of its completeness.

This then seems to us the end and purpose of the *Commedia*;—to produce on the mind a sense of the judgments of God, analogous to that produced by

Scripture itself. They are presented to us in the Bible in shapes which address themselves primarily to the heart and conscience, and seek not carefully to explain themselves. They are likened to the "great deep," to the "strong mountains"—vast and awful, but abrupt and incomplete, as the huge, broken, rugged piles and chains of mountains. And we see them through cloud and mist, in shapes only approximating to the true ones. Still they impress us deeply and truly, often the more deeply because unconsciously. A character, an event, a word, isolated and unexplained, stamps its meaning ineffaceably, though ever a matter of question and wonder; it may be dark to the intellect, yet the conscience understands it, often but too well. In such suggestive ways is the Divine government for the most part put before us in the Bible—ways which do not satisfy the understanding, but which fill us with a sense of reality. And it seems to have been by meditating on them, which he certainly did, much and thoughtfully—and on the infinite variety of similar ways in which the strongest impressions are conveyed to us in ordinary life, by means short of clear and distinct explanation —by looks, by images, by sounds, by motions, by remote allusion and broken words, that Dante was led to choose so new and remarkable a mode of conveying to his countrymen his thoughts and feelings

and presentiments about the mystery of God's counsel. The Bible teaches us by means of real history, traced so far as is necessary along its real course. The poet expresses his view of the world also in real history, but carried on into figure.

The poetry with which the Christian Church had been instinct from the beginning, converges and is gathered up in the *Commedia.* The faith had early shown its poetical aspect. It is superfluous to dwell on this, for it is the charge against ancient teaching that it was too large and imaginative. It soon began to try rude essays in sculpture and mosaic: expressed its feeling of nature in verse and prose, rudely also, but often with originality and force; and opened a new vein of poetry in the thoughts, hopes, and aspirations of regenerate man. Modern poetry must go back, for many of its deepest and most powerful sources, to the writings of the Fathers, and their followers of the School. The Church further had a poetry of its own, besides the poetry of literature; it had the poetry of devotion—the Psalter chanted daily, in a new language and a new meaning; and that wonderful body of hymns, to which age after age had contributed its offering, from the Ambrosian hymns to the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* of a king of France, the *Pange lingua* of Thomas Aquinas, the *Dies iræ*, and *Stabat Mater*, of the two Franciscan

brethren, Thomas of Celano, and Jacopone.[1] The elements and fragments of poetry were everywhere in the Church—in her ideas of life, in her rules and institutions for passing through it, in her preparation for death, in her offices, ceremonial, celebrations, usages, her consecration of domestic, literary, commercial, civic, military, political life, the meanings and ends she had given them, the religious seriousness with which the forms of each were dignified—in her doctrine, and her dogmatic system—her dependence on the unseen world—her Bible. From each and all of these, and from that public feeling which, if it expressed itself but abruptly and incoherently, was quite alive to the poetry which surrounded it, the poet received due impressions of greatness and beauty, of joy and dread. Then the poetry of Christian religion and Christian temper, hitherto dispersed, or manifested in act only, found its full and distinct utterance, not unworthy to rank in grandeur, in music, in sustained strength, with the last noble voices from expiring Heathenism.

But a long interval had passed since then. The *Commedia* first disclosed to Christian and modern Europe that it was to have a literature of its own, great and admirable, though in its own language and embodying its own ideas. "It was as if, at some of

[1] Trench, *Sacred Latin Poetry*, 1849.

the ancient games, a stranger had appeared upon the plain, and thrown his quoit among the marks of former casts, which tradition had ascribed to the demi-gods."[1] We are so accustomed to the excellent and varied literature of modern times, so original, so perfect in form and rich in thought, so expressive of all our sentiments, meeting so completely our wants, fulfilling our ideas, that we can scarcely imagine the time when this condition was new—when society was beholden to a foreign language for the exponents of its highest thoughts and feelings. But so it was when Dante wrote. The great poets, historians, philosophers of his day, the last great works of intellect, belonged to old Rome and the Latin language. So wonderful and prolonged was the fascination of Rome. Men still lived under its influence; believed that the Latin language was the perfect and permanent instrument of thought in its highest forms, the only expression of refinement and civilisation; and had not conceived the hope that their own dialects could ever rise to such heights of dignity and power. Latin, which had enchased and preserved such precious remains of ancient wisdom, was now shackling the living mind in its efforts. Men imagined that they were still using it naturally on all high themes and solemn business; but though

[1] Hallam's *Middle Ages*, c. ix. vol. iii. p. 563.

they used it with facility, it was no longer natural; it had lost the elasticity of life, and had become in their hands a stiffened and distorted, though still powerful, instrument. The very use of the word *latino* in the writers of this period, to express what is clear and philosophical in language,[1] while it shows their deep reverence for it, shows how Latin civilisation was no longer their own, how it had insensibly become an external and foreign element. But they found it very hard to resign their claim to a share in its glories; with nothing of their own to match against it, they still delighted to speak of it as "our language," or its writers as "our poets," "our historians."[2]

The spell was indeed beginning to break. Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's strange, stern, speculative friend, who is one of the fathers of the Italian language, is characterised in the *Commedia*[3] by his scornful dislike of Latin, even in the mouth of Virgil. Yet Dante himself, the great assertor, by argument and example, of the powers of the Vulgar tongue, once dared not to think that the Vulgar tongue could be other to the Latin, than as a subject to his sovereign. He

[1] *Parad.* 3, 12, 17. *Convit.* p. 108. "A più *Latinamente* vedere la sentenza letterale."

[2] *Vide* the *De Monarchia.*

[3] *Inf.* 10, and compare the *Vit. N.* p. 334, ed. Fraticelli.

was bolder when he wrote *De Vulgari Eloquio;* but in the earlier *Convito*, while pleading earnestly for the beauty of the Italian, he yields with reverence the first place to the Latin—for nobleness, because the Latin is permanent, and the Vulgar subject to fluctuation and corruption; for power, because the Latin can express conceptions to which the Vulgar is unequal; for beauty, because the structure of the Latin is a masterly arrangement of scientific art, and the beauty of the Vulgar depends on mere use.[1] The very title of his poem, the *Commedia*, contains in it a homage to the lofty claims of the Latin. It is called a Comedy, and not Tragedy, he says, after a marvellous account of the essence and etymology of the two, first, because it begins sadly, and ends joyfully; and next, because of its language, that humble speech of ordinary life, "in which even women converse."[2]

[1] *Convito*, i. 5.

[2] Ep. ad Kan Grand. § 9,—a curious specimen of the learning of the time: "Sciendum est, quod *Comœdia* dicitur a κωμη, *villa* et ωδη, quod est *cantus*, unde *Comœdia* quasi *villanus cantus*. Et est *Comœdia genus quoddam poeticæ narrationis*, ab omnibus aliis differens. Differt ergo a Tragœdia in materia per hoc, quod Tragœdia in principio est admirabilis et quieta, in fine fœtida et horribilis; et dicitur propter hoc a τραγος, i.e. *hircus*, et ωδη, quasi *cantus hircinus*, *i.e.* fœtidus ad modum hirci, ut patet per Senecam in suis tragœdiis. *Comœdia* vero inchoat asperitatem alicujus rei, sed ejus materia prospere terminatur, ut patet per Terentium in suis *Comœdiis*. . . . Similiter differunt

He honoured the Latin, but his love was for the Italian. He was its champion and indignant defender against the depreciation of ignorance and fashion. Confident of its power and jealous of its beauty, he pours forth his fierce scorn on the blind stupidity, the affectation, the vainglory, the envy, and above all, the cowardice of Italians who held lightly their mother tongue. "Many," he says, after enumerating the other offenders, "from this pusillanimity and cowardice disparage their own language, and exalt that of others; and of this sort are those hateful

in modo loquendi; elate et sublime Tragœdia, *Comœdia* vero remisse et humiliter sicut vult Horat. in Poët. . . . Et per hoc patet, quod *Comœdia* dicitur præsens opus. Nam si ad materiam respiciamus, a principio horribilis et fœtida est, quia *Infernus:* in fine prospera, desiderabilis et grata, quia *Paradisus.* Si ad modum loquendi, remissus est modus et humilis, quia locutio Vulgaris, in qua et mulierculæ communicant. Et sic patet quia *Comœdia* dicitur." Cf. de Vulg. Eloq. 2, 4, *Parad.* 30. He calls the Æneid, "*l' alta Tragedia,*" *Inf.* 20, 113. Compare also Boccaccio's explanation of his mother's dream of the *peacock.* Dante, he says, is like the Peacock, among other reasons, "because the peacock has coarse feet, and a quiet gait;" and "the vulgar language, on which the *Commedia* supports itself, is coarse in comparison with the high and masterly literary style which every other poet uses, though it be more beautiful than others, being in conformity with modern minds. The quiet gait signifies the humility of the style, which is necessarily required in *Commedia,* as those know who understand what is meant by *Commedia.*"

dastards of Italy—*abbominevoli cattivi d' Italia*—who think vilely of that precious language; which, if it is vile in anything, is vile only so far as it sounds in the prostituted mouth of these adulterers."[1] He noted and compared its various dialects; he asserted its capabilities not only in verse, but in expressive, flexible, and majestic prose. And to the deliberate admiration of the critic and the man, were added the homely but dear associations, which no language can share with that of early days. Italian had been the language of his parents—"*Questo mio Volgare fu il congiugnitore delli miei generanti, che con esso parlavano*" —and further, it was this modern language, "*questo mio Volgare*," which opened to him the way of knowledge, which had introduced him to Latin, and the sciences which it contained. It was his benefactor and guide—he personifies it—and his boyish friendship had grown stronger and more intimate by mutual good offices. "There has also been between us the goodwill of intercourse; for from the beginning of my life I have had with it kindness and conversation, and have used it, deliberating, interpreting, and questioning; so that, if friendship grows with use, it is evident how it must have grown in me."[2]

From this language he exacted a hard trial,—a work which should rank with the ancient works.

[1] *Convito*, i. 11. [2] *Convito*, i. 13.

None such had appeared; none had even advanced such a pretension. Not that it was a time dead to literature or literary ambition. Poets and historians had written, and were writing in Italian. The same year of jubilee which fixed itself so deeply in Dante's mind, and became the epoch of his vision—the same scene of Roman greatness in its decay, which afterwards suggested to Gibbon the *Decline and Fall*, prompted, in the father of Italian history, the desire to follow in the steps of Sallust and Livy, and prepare the way for Machiavelli and Guicciardini, Davila, and Fra Paolo.[1] Poetry had been cultivated in the

[1] G. Villani was at Rome in the year of jubilee 1300, and describes the great concourse and order of the pilgrims, whom he reckons at 200,000, in the course of the year. "And I," he proceeds, "finding myself in that blessed pilgrimage in the holy city of Rome, seeing the great and ancient things of the same, and reading the histories of the great deeds of the Romans, written by Virgil, and by Sallust, and Lucan, and Titus Livius, and Valerius and Paulus Orosius and other masters of histories, who wrote as well of the smaller matters as of the greater, concerning the exploits and deeds of the Romans; and further, of the strange things of the whole world, for memory and example's sake to those who should come after—I, too, took their style and fashion, albeit that, as their scholar, I be not worthy to execute such a work. But, considering that our city of Florence, the daughter and creation of Rome, was in its rising, and on the eve of achieving great things, as Rome was in its decline, it seemed to me convenient to bring into this volume and new chronicle all the deeds and beginnings of the city of Florence,

Roman languages of the West—in Aquitaine and Provence, especially—for more than two centuries; and lately, with spirit and success, in Italian. Names had become popular, reputations had risen and waned, verses circulated and were criticised, and even descended from the high and refined circles to the workshop. A story is told of Dante's indignation, when he heard the canzoni which had charmed the Florentine ladies mangled by the rude enthusiasm of a blacksmith at his forge.[1] Literature was a growing fashion; but it was humble in its aspirations and efforts. Men wrote like children, surprised and pleased with their success; yet allowing themselves in mere amusement, because conscious of weakness which they could not cure.

Dante, by the *Divina Commedia*, was the restorer of seriousness in literature. He was so by the magnitude and pretensions of his work, and by the earnestness of its spirit. He first broke through the

so far as I have been able to gather and recover them; and for the future, to follow at large the doings of the Florentines, and the other notable things of the world briefly, as long as it may be God's pleasure; under which hope, rather by his grace than by my poor science, I entered on this enterprise: and so, in the year 1300, being returned from Rome, I began to compile this book, in reverence towards God and St. John, and commendation of our city of Florence."—*G. Vill.* viii. 36.

[1] *Sacchetti*, Nov. 114.

prescription which had confined great works to the Latin, and the faithless prejudices which, in the language of society, could see powers fitted for no higher task than that of expressing, in curiously diversified forms, its most ordinary feelings. But he did much more. Literature was going astray in its tone, while growing in importance; the *Commedia* checked it. The Provençal and Italian poetry was, with the exception of some pieces of political satire, almost exclusively amatory, in the most fantastic and affected fashion. In expression, it had not even the merit of being natural; in purpose it was trifling; in the spirit which it encouraged, it was something worse. Doubtless it brought a degree of refinement with it, but it was refinement purchased at a high price, by intellectual distortion, and moral insensibility. But this was not all. The brilliant age of Frederick II., for such it was, was deeply mined by religious unbelief. However strange this charge first sounds against the thirteenth century, no one can look at all closely into its history, at least in Italy, without seeing that the idea of infidelity—not heresy, but infidelity—was quite a familiar one; and that side by side with the theology of Aquinas and Bonaventura, there was working among those who influenced fashion and opinion, among the great men, and the men to whom learning was a profession, a

spirit of scepticism and irreligion almost monstrous for its time, which found its countenance in Frederick's refined and enlightened court. The genius of the great doctors might have kept in safety the Latin Schools, but not the free and home thoughts which found utterance in the language of the people, if the solemn beauty of the Italian *Commedia* had not seized on all minds. It would have been an evil thing for Italian, perhaps for European literature, if the siren tales of the *Decameron* had been the first to occupy the ear with the charms of a new language.

Dante has had hard measure, and from some who are most beholden to him. No one in his day served the Church more highly than he whose faith and genius secured on her side the first great burst of imagination and feeling, the first perfect accents of modern speech. The first-fruits of the new literature were consecrated and offered up. There was no necessity, or even probability in Italy in the fourteenth century that it should be so, as there might perhaps have been earlier. It was the poet's free act—free in one, for whom nature and heathen learning had strong temptations—that religion was the lesson and influence of the great popular work of the time. That which he held up before men's awakened and captivated minds, was the verity of God's moral government. To rouse them to a sense

of the mystery of their state; to startle their commonplace notions of sin into an imagination of its variety, its magnitude, and its infinite shapes and degrees; to open their eyes to the beauty of the Christian temper, both as suffering and as consummated; to teach them at once the faithfulness and awful freeness of God's grace; to help the dull and lagging soul to conceive the possibility, in its own case, of rising step by step in joy without an end—of a felicity not unimaginable by man, though of another order from the highest perfection of earth;—this is the poet's end. Nor was it only vague religious feelings which he wished to excite. He brought within the circle of common thought, and translated into the language of the multitude, what the Schools had done to throw light on the deep questions of human existence, which all are fain to muse upon, though none can solve. He who had opened so much of men's hearts to themselves, opened to them also that secret sympathy which exists between them and the great mysteries of the Christian doctrine.[1] He did the work, in his day, of a great preacher. Yet he has been both claimed and condemned, as a disturber of the Church's faith.

He certainly did not spare the Church's rulers He thought they were betraying the most sacred of all trusts; and if history is at all to be relied on, he

[1] *Vide* Ozanam.

had some grounds for thinking so. But it is confusing the feelings of the Middle Ages with our own, to convert every fierce attack on the Popes into an anticipation of Luther. Strong language of this sort was far too commonplace to be so significant. No age is blind to practical abuses, or silent on them; and when the Middle Ages complained, they did so with a full-voiced and clamorous rhetoric, which greedily seized on every topic of vilification within its reach. It was far less singular, and far less bold, to criticise ecclesiastical authorities, than is often supposed; but it by no means implied unsettled faith, or a revolutionary design. In Dante's case, if words have any meaning—not words of deliberate qualification, but his unpremeditated and incidental expressions—his faith in the Divine mission and spiritual powers of the Popes was as strong as his abhorrence of their degeneracy, and desire to see it corrected by a power which they would respect—that of the temporal sword. It would be to mistake altogether his character, to imagine of him, either as a fault or as an excellence, that he was a doubter. It might as well be supposed of Aquinas.

No one ever acknowledged with greater seriousness, as a fact in his position in the world, the agreement in faith among those with whom he was born. No one ever inclined with more simplicity and

reverence before that long communion and consent in feeling and purpose, the "*publicus sensus*" of the Christian Church. He did feel difficulties; but the excitement of lingering on them was not among his enjoyments. That was the lot of the heathen; Virgil, made wise by death, counsels him not to desire it:

"Matto è chi spera, che nostra ragione
Possa trascorrer la 'nfinita via
Che tiene una sustanzia in tre Persone.
State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*;
Che se potuto aveste veder tutto,
Mestier non era partorir Maria:
E disiar vedeste senza frutto
Tai, che sarebbe lor disio quetato,
Ch' eternamente è dato lor per lutto;
I' dico d' Aristotile e di Plato,
E di molti altri:"—e qui chinò la fronte,
E più non disse, e rimase turbato.—*Purg.* c. 3.[1]

[1] "Insensate he, who thinks with mortal ken
To pierce Infinitude, which doth enfold
Three Persons in one Substance. Seek not then,
O mortal race, for reasons—but believe,
And be contented; for had all been seen,
No need there was for Mary to conceive.
Men have ye known, who thus desired in vain;
And whose desires, that might at rest have been,
Now constitute a source of endless pain;
Plato, the Stagirite; and many more,
I here allude to;"—then his head he bent,
Was silent, and a troubled aspect wore.—WRIGHT.

The Christian poet felt that it was greater to believe and to act. In the darkness of the world one bright light appeared, and he followed it. Providence had assigned him his portion of truth, his portion of daily bread; if to us it appears blended with human elements, it is perfectly clear that he was in no position to sift them. To choose was no trial of his. To examine and seek, where it was impossible to find, would have been folly. The authority from which he started had not yet been seriously questioned; there were no palpable signs of doubtfulness on the system which was to him the representative of God's will; and he sought for none. It came to him claiming his allegiance by custom, by universality, by its completeness as a whole, and satisfying his intellect and his sympathies in detail. And he gave his allegiance—reasonably, because there was nothing to hope for in doubting—wisely, because he gave it loyally and from his heart.

And he had his reward—the reward of him who throws himself with frankness and earnestness into a system; who is not afraid or suspicious of it; who is not unfaithful to it. He gained not merely power—he gained that freedom and largeness of mind which the suspicious or the unfaithful miss. His loyalty to the Church was no cramping or blinding service; it

left to its full play that fresh and original mind, left it to range at will in all history and all nature for the traces of Eternal wisdom, left it to please itself with all beauty, and pay its homage to all excellence. For upon all wisdom, beauty, and excellence, the Church had taught him to see, in various and duly distinguished degrees, the seal of the one Creator. She imparts to the poem, to its form and progressive development, her own solemnity, her awe, her calm, her serenity and joy; it follows her sacred seasons and hours; repeats her appointed words of benediction and praise; moulds itself on her belief, her expectations, and forecastings.[1] Her intimations, more or less distinct, dogma or tradition or vague hint, guide the poet's imagination through the land where all eyes are open. The journey begins under the Easter moon of the year of jubilee, on the evening of Good Friday; the days of her mourning he spends in the regions of woe, where none dares to pronounce the name of the Redeemer, and he issues forth to "behold again the stars," to learn how to die to sin and rise to righteousness, very early in the morning, as it begins to dawn, on the day of the Resurrection. The whole arrangement of the *Purgatorio* is drawn from Church usages. It is a picture of men suffering in calm and holy hope the sharp discipline of repent-

[1] See an article in the *Brit. Critic*, No. 65, p. 120.

ance, amid the prayers, the melodies, the consoling images and thoughts, the orderly ritual, the hours of devotion, the sacraments of the Church militant. When he ascends in his hardiest flight, and imagines the joys of the perfect and the vision of God, his abundant fancy confines itself strictly to the limits sanctioned by her famous teachers—ventures into no new sphere, hazards no anticipations in which they have not preceded it, and is content with adding to the poetry which it elicits from their ideas, a beauty which it is able to conceive apart altogether from bodily form—the beauty, infinite in its variety, of the expression of the human eye and smile—the beauty of light, of sound, of motion. And when his song mounts to its last strain of triumph, and the poet's thought, imagination, and feeling of beauty, tasked to the utmost, nor failing under the weight of glory which they have to express, breathe themselves forth in words, higher than which no poetry has ever risen, and represent, in images transcending sense, and baffling it, yet missing not one of those deep and transporting sympathies which they were to touch, the sight, eye to eye, of the Creator by the creature —he beholds the gathering together, in the presence of God, of "all that from our earth has to the skies returned," and of the countless orders of their thrones mirrored in His light—

Mira
Quanto è 'l convento delle bianche stole—[1]

under a figure already taken into the ceremonial of the Church—the mystic Rose, whose expanding leaves image forth the joy of the heavenly Jerusalem, both triumphant and militant.[2]

[1] Behold
How great the gathering of the white-stoled throng.

[2] See the form of benediction of the "Rosa d'oro." *Rituum Ecclesiæ Rom. Libri Tres.* fol. xxxv. Venet 1516. Form of giving: "Accipe rosam de manibus nostris. . . . per quam designatur gaudium utriusque Hierusalem triumphantis scilicet et militantis ecclesiæ, per quam omnibus Christi fidelibus manifestatur flos ipse pretiosissimus qui est gaudium et corona sanctorum omnium." He alludes to it in the *Convito*, iv. 29.

O isplendor di Dio, per cu' io vidi
L' alto trionfo del regno verace,
Dammi virtù a dir com' io lo vidi.
Lume è lassù, che visibile face
Lo creatore a quella creatura,
Che solo in lui vedere ha la sua pace:
E si distende in circular figura
In tanto, che la sua circonferenza
Sarebbe al Sol troppo larga cintura.
. . . . . .
E come clivo in acqua di suo imo
Si specchia quasi per vedersi adorno,
Quanto è nel verde e ne' fioretti opimo;
Sì soprastando al lume intorno intorno
Vidi specchiarsi in più di mille soglie,
Quanto di noi lassù fatto ha ritorno.

But this universal reference to the religious ideas of the Church is so natural, so unaffected, that it leaves him at full liberty in other orders of thought. He can afford not to be conventional—he can afford

---

E se l' infimo grado in se raccoglie
Sì grande lume, quant' è la larghezza
Di questa rosa nell' estreme foglie?

. . . . .

Nel giallo della rosa sempiterna,
Che si dilata, rigrada, e redole
Odor di lode al Sol, che sempre verna,
Qual' è colui, che tace e dicer vuole,
Mi trasse Beatrice, e disse; mira
Quanto è 'l convento delle bianche stole!
Vedi nostra Città quanto ella gira!
Vedi li nostri scanni sì ripieni,
Che poca gente omai ci si disira.

. . . . .

In forma dunque di candida rosa
Mi si mostrava la milizia santa,
Che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa.—*Parad.* 30, 31.

O splendour of the Godhead, by whose aid
I saw the triumph of that kingdom true,
Give me the power to tell what I surveyed.
A light there is above, which plainly shows
The Great Creator to the creature, who
In seeing Him alone can find repose.
And in a circle spreads to such degree,
That for the sun would its circumference
A girdle of too great dimensions be:—

. . . . .

to be comprehensive and genuine. It has been remarked how, in a poem where there would seem to be a fitting place for them, the ecclesiastical legends of the Middle Ages are almost entirely absent. The sainted spirits of the *Paradiso* are not exclusively or chiefly the Saints of popular devotion. After the Saints of the Bible, the holy women, the three great

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And as a cliff looks down upon the bed
Of some clear stream, to see how richly crowned
With flowers and foliage is its lofty head;
So, all from earth who hither e'er returned,
Seated on more than thousand thrones around,
Within the Eternal Light themselves discerned.
And if the very lowest step receives
A light so great, how wonderful must be
The Rose expanded in its utmost leaves?

. . . . .

Within the yellow of the Rose eternal
Which spreads its leaves, all redolent of praise,
Unto the sun whose beams are ever vernal,
Like one who her desire to speak suppresses,
Me Beatrice drew with her; as she cried,
"See the vast number of these snow-white dresses.
See how extensive is our city;—see
Our benches are so nearly occupied,
That few new comers may admitted be."

. . . . .

In semblance like unto the whitest rose
That sacred band I saw enthroned above,
Which for His Spouse in death our Saviour chose.—

WRIGHT.

Apostles, the Virgin mother, they are either names personally dear to the poet himself, friends whom he had loved, and teachers to whom he owed wisdom—or great men of masculine energy in thought or action, in their various lines "compensations and antagonists of the world's evils"—Justinian and Constantine, and Charlemagne—the founders of the Orders, Augustine, Benedict, and Bernard, Francis and Dominic—the great doctors of the Schools, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura, whom the Church had not yet canonised. And with them are joined—and that with a full consciousness of the line which theology draws between the dispensations of nature and grace—some rare types of virtue among the heathen. Cato is admitted to the outskirts of Purgatory; Trajan, and the righteous king of Virgil's poem, to the heaven of the just.[1]

[1] Chi crederebbe giù nel mondo errante,
Che Rifèo Trojano[1] in questo tondo
Fosse la quinta delle luci sante?
Ora conosce assai di quel, che 'l mondo
Veder non può della divina grazia;
Benchè sua vista non discerna il fondo.—*Parad.* c. 20.

Who, in this erring world of man below,
Would think the Trojan Ripheus e'er could be
The fifth effulgence of this holy bow?

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[1] Rhipeus justissimus unus
Qui fuit in Teucris, et servantissimus æqui.—*Æn.* ii.

Without confusion or disturbance to the religious character of his train of thought, he is able freely to subordinate to it the lessons and the great recollections of the Gentile times. He contemplates them with the veil drawn off from them—as now known to form but one whole with the history of the Bible and the Church, in the design of Providence. He presents them in their own colours, as drawn by their own writers—he only adds what Christianity seems to show to be their event. Under the conviction, that the light of the Heathen was a real guide from above, calling for vengeance in proportion to unfaithfulness, or outrage done to it—"He that nurtureth the heathen, it is He that teacheth man knowledge—shall not He punish?"—the great criminals of profane history are mingled with sinners against God's revealed will—and that, with equal dramatic power, with equal feeling of the greatness of their loss. The story of the voyage of Ulysses is told with as much vivid power and pathetic interest as the tales of the day.[1] He honours unfeignedly the old heathen's brave disdain of ease; that spirit, even to old age, eager, fresh, adventurous, and inquisitive.

[1] Full well discerns he now the heavenly Grace,
Which mortals, blindly groping, cannot see,
Although unable all its depth to trace.—WRIGHT.

[1] *Inf.* c. 26.

His faith allowed him to admire all that was beautiful and excellent among the heathen, without forgetting that it fell short of what the new gift of the Gospel can alone impart. He saw in it proof that God had never left His will and law without their witness among men. Virtue was virtue still, though imperfect, and unconsecrated—generosity, largeness of soul, truth, condescension, justice, were never unworthy of the reverence of Christians. Hence he uses without fear or scruple the classic element. The examples which recall to the minds of the penitents, by sounds and sights, in the different terraces of Purgatory, their sin and the grace they have to attain to, come indiscriminately from poetry and Scripture. The sculptured pavement, to which the proud are obliged ever to bow down their eyes, shows at once the humility of St. Mary and of the Psalmist, and the condescension of Trajan; and elsewhere the pride of Nimrod and Sennacherib, of Niobe, and Cyrus. The envious hear the passing voices of courtesy from saints and heroes, and the bursting cry, like crashing thunder, of repentant jealousy from Cain and Aglaurus; the avaricious, to keep up the memory of their fault, celebrate by day the poverty of Fabricius and the liberality of St. Nicolas, and execrate by night the greediness of Pygmalion and Midas, of Achan, Heliodorus, and Crassus.

Dante's all-surveying, all-embracing mind, was worthy to open the grand procession of modern poets. He had chosen his subject in a region remote from popular thought—too awful for it, too abstruse. He had accepted frankly the dogmatic limits of the Church, and thrown himself with even enthusiastic faith into her reasonings, at once so bold and so undoubting—her spirit of certainty, and her deep contemplations on the unseen and infinite. And in literature, he had taken as guides and models, above all criticism and all appeal, the classical writers. But with his mind full of the deep and intricate questions of metaphysics and theology, and his poetical taste always owning allegiance to Virgil, Ovid, and Statius —keen and subtle as a Schoolman—as much an idolator of old heathen art and grandeur as the men of the *Renaissance*—his eye is yet as open to the delicacies of character, to the variety of external nature, to the wonders of the physical world—his interest in them as diversified and fresh, his impressions as sharp and distinct, his rendering of them as free and true and forcible, as little weakened or confused by imitation or by conventional words, his language as elastic, and as completely under his command, his choice of poetic materials as unrestricted and original, as if he had been born in days which claim as their own such freedom, and such keen discriminative sense of what

is real, in feeling and image;—as if he had never felt the attractions of a crabbed problem of scholastic logic, or bowed before the mellow grace of the Latins. It may be said, indeed, that the time was not yet come when the classics could be really understood and appreciated; and this is true, perhaps fortunate. But admiring them with a kind of devotion, and showing not seldom that he had caught their spirit, he never *attempts* to copy them. His poetry in form and material is all his own. He asserted the poet's claim to borrow from all science, and from every phase of nature, the associations and images which he wants; and he showed that those images and associations did not lose their poetry by being expressed with the most literal reality.

But let no reader of fastidious taste disturb his temper by the study of Dante. Dante certainly opened that path of freedom and poetic conquest, in which the greatest efforts of modern poetry have followed him—opened it with a magnificence and power which have never been surpassed. But the greatest are but pioneers; they must be content to leave to a posterity, which knows more, if it cannot do as much, a keen and even growing sense of their defects. The *Commedia* is open to all the attacks that can be made on grotesqueness and extravagance. This is partly owing, doubtless, to the time, in itself

quaint, quainter to us, by being remote and ill-understood; but even then, weaker and less daring writers than Dante do not equally offend or astonish us. So that an image or an expression will render forcibly a thought, there is no strangeness which checks him. Barbarous words are introduced, to express the cries of the demons or the confusion of Babel—even to represent the incomprehensible song of the blessed;[1] inarticulate syllables, to convey the impression of some natural sound—the cry of sorrowful surprise:

Alto sospir, che duolo strinse in *hui*;—*Purg.* 16.[2]

or the noise of the cracking ice:

Se Tabernicch
Vi fosse su caduto, o Pietra-pana
Non avria pur del orlo fatto *cricch*;—*Inf.* 32.[3]

even separate letters—to express an image, to spell a name, or as used in some popular proverb.[4] He

[1] *Parad.* 7, 1-3.

[2] A sigh profound he drew, by brief intense.
Forced into "Oh!"

[3] For Tambernicchi falling down below,
Or Pietra-pana hurled in ruin there,
Had now e'en cracked its margin with the blow.

[4] To describe the pinched face of famine;—
Parean l' occhiaje annella senza gemme.
Chi nel viso degli uomini legge OMO
Ben avria quivi conosciuto l' *emme* (M).—*Purg.* 23.

employs without scruple and often with marvellous force of description, any recollection that occurs to him, however homely, of everyday life;—the old tailor threading his needle with trouble (*Inf.* 15);—the cook's assistant watching over the boiling broth (*Inf.* 21);—the hurried or impatient horse-groom using his curry-comb (*Inf.* 29);—or the common sights of the street or the chamber—the wet wood sputtering on the hearth:

> Come d' un stizzo verde che arso sia
> Dall' un de' capi, che dall' altro geme
> E cigola per vento che va via;—*Inf.* 13.[1]

The sockets seemed like rings without the gems;
Who readeth "OMO" on man's visage, he
Had then full plainly recognised the Ms.

Again,

> Quella reverenza che s' indonna
> Di tutto me, pur per B e per ICE.—*Parad.* 7.
>
> But with that reverential awe imbued,
> Which all the letters of her name inspire.
>
> Nè O si tosto mai, nè I si scrisse,
> Com' ei s' accese ed arse.—*Inf.* 24.
>
> So quickly ne'er was written O, or I,
> As he took fire and burnt.—WRIGHT.

[1] Like to a sapling, lighted at one end,
Which at the other hisses with the wind,
And drops of sap doth from the outlet send:
So from the broken twig, both words and blood flow'd forth.
Ibid.

the paper changing colour when about to catch fire:

Come procede innanzi dall' ardore
Per lo papiro suso un color bruno
Che non è nero ancora, e 'l bianco muore:—*Inf.* 25.[1]

the steaming of the hand when bathed, in winter:

Fuman come man bagnata il verno:—

on the ways and appearances of animals—ants meeting on their path:

Lì veggio d' ogni parte farsi presta
Ciascun' ombra, e baciarsi una con una
Senza restar, contente a breve festa:
Così per entro loro schiera bruna
S' ammusa l' una con l' altra formica,
Forse a spiar lor via e lor fortuna;—*Purg.* 26.[2]

the snail drawing in its horns (*Inf.* 25);—the hog shut out of its sty, and trying to gore with its tusks (*Inf.* 30);—the dogs' misery in summer (*Inf.* 17);—the frogs jumping on to the bank before the water-

[1] Like burning paper, when there glides before
The advancing flame a brown and dingy shade,
Which is not black, and yet is white no more.—WRIGHT.

[2] On either hand I saw them haste their meeting,
And kiss each one the other—pausing not—
Contented to enjoy so short a greeting.
Thus do the ants among their dingy band,
Face one another—each their neighbour's lot
Haply to scan, and how their fortunes stand.—*Ibid.*

snake (*Inf.* 9);—or showing their heads above water:

Come al orlo dell' acqua d' un fosso
Stan gli ranocchi *pur col muso fuori*,
Sì che celano i piedi, e l' altro grosso.—*Inf.* 22.[1]

It must be said, that most of these images, though by no means all, occur in the *Inferno;* and that the poet means to paint sin not merely in the greatness of its ruin and misery, but in characters which all understand, of strangeness, of vileness, of despicableness, blended with diversified and monstrous horror. Even he seems to despair of his power at times:

S' io avessi le rime e aspre, e chiocce,
Come si converrebbe al tristo buco,
Sovra 'l qual pontan tutte l' altre rocce;
Io premerrei di mio concetto il suco
Più pienamente; ma perch' io non l' abbo,
Non senza tema a dicer mi conduco:
Che non è 'mpresa da pigliare a gabbo

[1] As in a trench, frogs at the water side,
Sit squatting, with their noses raised on high,
The while their feet, and all their bulk they hide—
Thus upon either hand the sinners stood.
But Barbariccia now approaching nigh,
Quick they withdrew beneath the boiling flood.
I saw—and still my heart is thrill'd with fear—
One spirit linger; as beside a ditch,
One frog remains, the others disappear.—WRIGHT.

Descriver fondo a tutto l' universo,
Nè da lingua, che chiami mamma, o babbo.—*Inf.* 32.[1]

Feeling the difference between sins, in their elements and, as far as we see them, their baseness, he treats them variously. His ridicule is apportioned with a purpose. He passes on from the doom of the sins of incontinence—the storm, the frost and hail, the crushing weights—from the flaming minarets of the city of Dis, of the Furies and Proserpine, "Donna dell' eterno pianto," where the unbelievers lie, each in his burning tomb—from the river of boiling blood—the wood with the Harpies—the waste of barren sand with fiery snow, where the violent are punished—to the Malebolge, the manifold circles of Falsehood. And here scorn and ridicule in various degrees, according to the vileness of the fraud, begin to predominate, till they culminate in that grim comedy, with its *dramatis personæ* and battle of devils,

[1] Had I a rhyme so rugged, rough, and hoarse
As would become the sorrowful abyss,
O'er which the rocky circles wind their course,
Then with a more appropriate form I might
Endow my vast conceptions; wanting this,
Not without fear I bring myself to write.
For no light enterprise it is, I deem,
To represent the lowest depth of all;
Nor should a childish tongue attempt the theme.
WRIGHT.

Draghignazzo, and Graffiacane, and Malacoda, where the peculators and sellers of justice are fished up by the demons from the boiling pitch, but even there overreach and cheat their tormentors, and make them turn their fangs on each other. The diversified forms of falsehood seem to tempt the poet's imagination to cope with its changefulness and inventions, as well as its audacity. The transformations of the wildest dream do not daunt him. His power over language is nowhere more forcibly displayed than in those cantos, which describe the punishments of theft —men passing gradually into serpents, and serpents into men:

> Due e nessun l' imagine perversa
> Parea.—*Inf.* 25.[1]

And when the traitor, who murdered his own kinsman, was still alive, and seemed safe from the infamy which it was the poet's rule to bestow only on the dead, Dante found a way to inflict his vengeance without an anachronism:—Branca D'Oria's body, though on earth, is only animated by a fiend, and his spirit has long since fled to the icy prison.[2]

[1] All vestige of the former shape was gone;
Nor one, nor two the unsightly frame expressed.
WRIGHT.

[2] Ed egli a me: Come 'l mio corpo stea
Nel mondo su, nulla scienzia porto.

These are strange experiments in poetry; their strangeness is exaggerated as detached passages; but they are strange enough when they meet us in their

---

Cotal vantaggio ha questa Tolommea,
Che spesse volte l' anima ci cade
Innanzi, ch' Atropòs mossa le dea.
E perchè tu più volontier mi rade
Le 'nvetriate lagrime dal volto,
Sappi, che tosto che l' anima trade,
Come fec' io, il corpo suo l' è tolto
Da un Dimonio, che poscia il governa,
Mentre che 'l tempo suo tutto sia volto.
Ella ruina in sì fatta cisterna;
E forse pare ancor lo corpo suso
Dell' ombra, che di qua dietro mi verna.
Tu 'l dei saper, se tu vien pur mo giuso:
Egli è ser Branca d' Oria, e son più anni
Poscia passati, ch' ei fu sì racchiuso.
Io credo, diss' io lui, che tu m' inganni,
Che Branca d' Oria non morì unquanche,
E mangia, e bee, e dorme, e veste panni.
Nel fosso su, diss' ei, di Malebranche,
Là dove bolle la tenace pece,
Non era giunto ancora Michel Zanche;
Che questi lasciò 'l diavolo in sua vece
Nel corpo suo, e d' un suo prossimano,
Che 'l tradimento insieme con lui fece.—*Inf.* 33.

" How on the earth above, my body fares—
That knowledge I possess not," he replied;
For souls oft hither come, by vengeance driven,
(Such privilege this Ptolomea shares),
Ere Atropos the fatal stroke hath given;

place in the context, as parts of a scene, where the mind is strung and overawed by the sustained power, with which dreariness, horror, hideous absence of every form of good, is kept before the imagination and feelings, in the fearful picture of human sin. But they belong to the poet's system of direct and forcible representation. What his inward eye sees, what he feels, that he means us to see and feel as he does; to make us see and feel is his art. Afterwards

---

And that more gladly thou mayest wipe away
The crystal tears congealed upon my face,
Know—soon as doth the soul, like mine, betray,
Its body by a demon is possessed,
By whom 'tis governed, till it fill the space
On earth allotted to its course unblest;
The soul descends to such a cistern here;
And still perhaps on earth the body 's seen
Of the sad shade which winters in my rear.
If lately thou cam'st hither, thou must know,
He is Ser Branca D'Oria whom I mean;—
For many years hath he been here below.
Then I; "Thou fain would'st dupe me, as I guess,
For Branca D'Oria surely is not dead,
But eats and drinks and sleeps and dons his dress."
"Ere to the trench above of Malebranche,
Where always boils the adhesive pitch," he said,
"Had yet arrived the hapless Michel Zanche,
This D'Oria's form the devil did assume;
His kinsman too—leagued in the treacherous plot,
Shared also in his miserable doom."—WRIGHT.

we may reflect and meditate? but first we must see—must see what he saw. Evil and deformity are in the world, as well as good and beauty; the eye cannot escape them, they are about our path, in our heart and memory. He has faced them without shrinking or dissembling, and extorted from them a voice of warning. In all poetry that is written for mere delight, in all poetry which regards but a part or an aspect of nature, they have no place—they disturb and mar; but he had conceived a poetry of the whole, which would be weak or false without them. Yet they stand in his poem as they stand in nature—subordinate and relieved. If the grotesque is allowed to intrude itself—if the horrible and the foul, undisguised and unsoftened, make us shudder and shrink, they are kept in strong check and in due subjection by other poetical influences; and the same power which exhibits them in their naked strength, renders its full grace and glory to beauty—its full force and delicacy to the most evanescent feeling.

Dante's eye was free and open to external nature in a degree new among poets; certainly in a far greater degree than among the Latins, even including Lucretius, whom he probably had never read. We have already spoken of his minute notice of the appearance of living creatures; but his eye was caught by the beautiful as well as by the grotesque.

Take the following beautiful picture of the bird looking out for dawn:

Come l'augello intra l'amate fronde,
Posato al nido de' suoi dolci nati,
La notte, che le cose ci nasconde,
Che per veder gli aspetti desiati,
E per trovar lo cibo, onde li pasca,
In che i gravi labor gli sono aggrati,
Previene 'l tempo in su l' aperta frasca,
E con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,
Fiso guardando, pur che l'alba nasca.—*Parad.* 23.[1]

Nothing indeed can be more true and original than his images of birds; they are varied and very numerous. We have the water-birds rising in clamorous and changing flocks:

Come augelli surti di riviera
Quasi congratulando a lor pasture,
Fanno di sè or tonda or lunga schiera;—*Parad.* 18.[2]

---

[1] E'en as the bird that resting in the nest
Of her sweet brood, the shelt'ring boughs among
While all things are enwrapt in night's dark vest—
Now eager to behold the looks she loves,
And to find food for her impatient young
(Whence labour grateful to a mother proves),
Forestalls the time, high perch'd upon the spray,
And with impassion'd zeal the sun expecting,
Anxiously waiteth the first break of day.—WRIGHT.

[2] And as birds rising from a stream, whence they
Their pastures view, as though their joy confessing.
Now form a round, and now a long array.—*Ibid.*

the rooks, beginning to move about at daybreak:

E come per lo natural costume,
Le pole insieme, al cominciar del giorno
Si muovono a scaldar le fredde piume,
Poi altre vanno via senza ritorno,
Altre rivolgon sè onde son mosse
Ed altre roteando fan soggiorno;—*Parad.* 21.[1]

the morning sounds of the swallow:

Nell' ora che comincia i tristi lai
La rondinella presso alla mattina,
Forse a memoria de' suoi primi guai;—*Purg.* 9.[2]

the joy and delight of the nightingale's song (*Purg.* 17); the lark, silent at last, filled with its own sweetness:

Qual lodoletta, che 'n aere si spazia,
Prima cantando, e *poi tace contenta*
Dell' ultima dolcezza che la sazia;—*Parad.* 20.[3]

---

[1] And as with one accord, at break of day,
The rooks bestir themselves, by nature taught
To chase the dew-drops from their wings away;
Some flying off, to reappear no more—
Others repairing to their nests again—
Some whirling round—then settling as before.—WRIGHT.

[2] What time the swallow pours her plaintive strain,
Saluting the approach of morning gray,
Thus haply mindful of her former pain.—*Ibid.*

[3] E'en as the lark high soaring pours its throat
Awhile, then rests in silence, as though still
It dwelt enamour'd of its last sweet note.—*Ibid.*

the flight of the starlings and storks (*Inf.* 5, *Purg.* 24); the mournful cry and long line of the cranes (*Inf.* 5, *Purg.* 26); the young birds trying to escape from the nest (*Purg.* 25); the eagle hanging in the sky:

Con l' ale aperte, e a calare intesa ;—

the dove, standing close to its mate, or wheeling round it:

Sì come quando 'l *colombo si pone*
Presso al compagno, l' uno e l' altro pande
Girando e mormorando l' affezione ;—*Parad.* 25.[1]

or the flock of pigeons, feeding:

Adunati alla pastura,
Queti, *senza mostrar l' usato orgoglio.*—*Purg.* 2.[2]

Hawking supplies its images: the falcon coming for its food:

Il falcon che prima a piè si mira,

---

[1] As when unto his partner's side, the dove
Approaches near—both fondly circling round,
And cooing, show the fervour of their love;
So these great heirs of immortality
Receive each other; while they joyful sound
The praises of the food they share on high.—WRIGHT

[2] United quietly to feel
Awhile their custom'd haughtiness allayed."—*Ibid.*

Indi si volge al grido, e si protende,
Per lo disio del pasto, che là il tira;—*Purg.* 19.[1]

or just unhooded, pluming itself for its flight:

Quale falcon, ch' esce del cappello,
Muove la testa, e con l' ale s' applaude,
Voglia mostrando, e facendosi bello;—Parad. 19.[2]

or returning without success, sullen and loath:

Come 'l falcon ch' è stato assai su l' ali,
Che senza veder logoro, o uccello,
Fa dire al falconiere: Oimè tu cali!
Discende lasso onde si muove snello
Per cento ruote, *e da lungi si pone*
Dal suo maestro, *disdegnoso e fello.—Inf.* 17.[3]

It is curious to observe him taking Virgil's similes, and altering them. When Virgil describes the throng

[1] And, as a falcon, which first scans its feet,
Then turns him to the call, and forward flies,
In eagerness to catch the tempting meat.—WRIGHT.

[2] Lo, as a falcon, from the hood released,
Uplifts his head, and joyous flaps his wings,
His beauty and his eagerness increased.—*Ibid.*

[3] E'en as a falcon, long upheld in air,
Not seeing lure or bird upon the wing,
So that the falconer utters in despair
"Alas, thou stoop'st!" fatigued descends from high;
And whirling quickly round in many a ring,
Far from his master sits—disdainfully.—*Ibid.*

of souls, he compares them to falling leaves, or gathering birds in autumn:

> Quam multa in silvis auctumni frigore primo
> Lapsa cadunt folia, aut ad terram gurgite ab alto
> Quam multæ glomerantur aves, ubi frigidus annus
> Trans pontum fugat, et terris immittit apricis—

Dante uses the same images, but without copying.

> Come d' Autunno si levan le foglie,
> L' una appresso dell' altra, infin che 'l ramo
> Rende alla terra tutte le sue spoglie;
> Similemente il mal seme d' Adamo:
> Gittansi di quel lito ad una ad una
> Per cenni, com' augel per suo richiamo.
> Così sen vanno su per l' onda bruna,
> Ed avanti che sien di là discese,
> Anche di qua nuova schiera s' aduna.—*Inf.* 3.[1]

Again—compared with one of Virgil's most highly-finished and perfect pictures, the flight of the pigeon, disturbed at first, and then becoming swift and smooth:

> Qualis spelunca subito commota columba,
> Cui domus et dulces latebroso in pumice nidi,

---

[1] As leaves in autumn, borne before the wind,
Drop one by one, until the branch laid bare,
Sees all its honours to the earth consign'd:
So cast them downward at his summons all
The guilty race of Adam from that strand—
Each as a falcon answering to the call.—WRIGHT.

Fertur in arva volans, plausumque exterrita pennis
Dat tecto ingentem, mox aere lapsa quieto
Radit iter liquidum, celeres neque commovet alas—

the Italian's simplicity and strength may balance the "ornata parola" of Virgil:

Quali colombe dal disio chiamate,
Con *l' ali aperte e ferme* al dolce nido
Volan per l' aer dal voler portate.—*Inf.* 5.[1]

Take, again, the *times of the day*, with what is characteristic of them—appearances, lights, feelings—

[1] As doves, by strong affection urged, repair
With firm expanded wings to their sweet nest,
Borne by the impulse of their will through air.—WRIGHT.

It is impossible not to be reminded at every step, in spite of the knowledge and taste which Mr. Cary and Mr. Wright have brought to their most difficult task, of the truth which Dante has expressed with his ordinary positiveness.

He is saying that he does not wish his Canzoni to be explained in Latin to those who could not read them in Italian: "Che sarebbe sposta la loro sentenzia colà dove elle *non la potessono colla loro bellezza portare.* E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame musaico (*i.e.* poetico) armonizzata, si può della sua loquela in altra trasmutare senza rompere tutta la sua dolcezza e armonia. E questa è la ragione per che Omero non si mutò mai di Greco in Latino, come l' altre scritture che avemo da loro.—*Convito*, i. c. 8, p. 49.

Dr. Carlyle has given up the idea of attempting to represent Dante's verse by English verse, and has confined himself to assisting Englishmen to read him in his own language. His prose translation is accurate and forcible. [1850.]

seldom dwelt on at length, but carried at once to the mind, and stamped upon it sometimes by a single word. The sense of *morning*, its inspiring and cheering strength, softens the opening of the *Inferno;* breathes its refreshing calm, in the interval of repose after the last horrors of hell, in the first canto of the *Purgatorio;* and prepares for the entrance into the earthly Paradise at its close. In the waning light of *evening*, and its chilling sense of loneliness, he prepared himself for his dread pilgrimage:

Lo giorno se n' andava, e l' aer bruno
Toglieva gli animai che sono 'n terra
Dalle fatiche loro ; ed io sol uno
M' apparechiava a sostener la guerra
Sì del cammino, e sì della pietate.—*Inf.* 2.[1]

Indeed there is scarcely an hour of day or night which has not left its own recollection with him;—of which we cannot find some memorial in his poem. Evening and night have many. Evening, with its softness and melancholy—its exhaustion and languor,

[1] The day was closing, and the dusky air
On all the creatures of the earth bestowed
Rest from their labours ;—I alone prepare
To struggle against pity, and to dare
A conflict with the horrors of the road,
Which an unerring memory shall declare.
WRIGHT.

after the work, perhaps unfulfilled, of day—its regrets and yearnings—its sounds and doubtful lights, the distant bell, the closing chants of Compline, the *Salve Regina*, the *Te lucis ante terminum*—with its insecurity, and its sense of protection from above—broods over the poet's first resting-place on his heavenly road—that still, solemn, dreamy scene—the Valley of Flowers in the mountain side, where those who have been negligent about their salvation, but not altogether faithless and fruitless, the assembled shades of great kings and of poets, wait, looking upwards, "pale and humble," for the hour when they may begin in earnest their penance. (*Purg.* 7 and 8.) The level, blinding evening beams (*Purg.* 15); the contrast of gathering darkness in the valley or on the shore with the lingering lights on the mountain (*Purg.* 17); the rapid sinking of the sun, and approach of night in the south (*Purg.* 27); the flaming sunset clouds of August; the sheet-lightning of summer (*Purg.* 5)—have left pictures in his mind, which an incidental touch reawakens, and a few strong words are sufficient to express. Other appearances he describes with more fulness. The stars coming out one by one, baffling at first the eye:

> Ed ecco intorno di chiarezza pari
> Nascer un lustro sopra quel che v' era,
> A guisa d' orizzonte, che rischiari.

E sì come al salir di prima sera
Comincian per lo Ciel nuove parvenze,
Sì che la cosa pare e non par vera ;—Parad. 14.[1]

or else, bursting out suddenly over the heavens:

Quando colui che tutto il mondo allume,
Del' emisperio nostro si discende,
E 'l giorno d' ogni parte si consuma ;
Lo ciel che sol di lui prima s' accende,
Subitamente si rifà parvente
Per molte luci in che una risplende ;—*Parad.* 20.[2]

or the effect of shooting-stars:

Quale per li seren tranquilli e puri
Discorre ad ora ad or subito fuoco
Movendo gli occhi che stavan sicuri,
E pare stella che tramuti loco,

---

[1] And lo, on high, and lucid as the one
Now there, encircling it, a light arose,
Like heaven when re-illumined by the sun :
And as at the first lighting up of eve
The sky doth new appearances disclose,
That now seem real, now the sight deceive.—WRIGHT.

[2] When he, who with his universal ray
The world illumines, quits our hemisphere,
And, from each quarter, daylight wears away ;
The heaven, erst kindled by his beam alone,
Sudden its lost effulgence doth repair
By many lights illumined but by one.—*Ibid.*

Se non che dalla parte onde s' accende
Nulla sen perde, ed esso dura poco ;—*Parad.* 15.[1]

or, again, that characteristic sight of the Italian summer night—the fire-flies :

Quante il villan che al poggio si riposa,
Nel tempo che colui che 'l mondo schiara
La faccia sua a noi tien men ascosa,
Come la mosca cede alla zenzara,
Vede lucciole giù per la vallea
Forse colà dove vendemmia ed ara.—*Inf.* 26.[2]

Noon, too, does not want its characteristic touches —the lightning-like glancing of the lizard's rapid motion :

Come il ramarro sotto la gran fersa

---

[1] As oft along the pure and tranquil sky
A sudden fire by night is seen to dart,
Attracting forcibly the heedless eye ;
And seems to be a star that changes place,
Save that no star is lost from out the part
It quits, and that it lasts a moment's space.—WRIGHT.

[2] As in that season when the sun least veils
His face that lightens all, what time the fly
Gives place to the shrill gnat, the peasant then,
Upon some cliff reclined, beneath him sees
Fire-flies innumerous spangling o'er the vale,
Vineyard or tilth, where his day-labour lies.—CARY.

Ne' dì canicular cangiando siepe
Folgore par, se la via attraversa ;—*Inf.* 25.[1]

the motes in the sunbeam at noontide (*Parad.* 14) ; its clear, diffused, insupportable brightness, filling all things :

E tutti eran già pieni
Dell' alto dì i giron del sacro monte.—*Purg.* 19.[2]

and veiling the sun in his own light :

Io veggio ben sì come *tu t' annidi*
Nel proprio lume.

. . . . .

Sì come 'l sol che si cela egli stessi
Per troppa luce, quando 'l caldo ha rose
Le temperanze de' vapori spessi.—*Parad.* 5.[3]

But the sights and feelings of morning are what

[1] As underneath the dog-star's scorching ray
The lizard, darting swift from fence to fence,
Appears like lightning, if he cross the way.—
WRIGHT.

[2] Now throughout all the sacred mountain were
The circles filled with light ; and as we went,
The youthful sun was shining in our rear.

[3] I see full well how in the light divine
Thou dwellest (lit. "makest thy nest").

. . . . .

And as the sun conceals himself from view,
Amid the splendour of the new-born day,
When he hath chased away the early dew.—*Ibid.*

he touches on most frequently; and he does so with the precision of one who had watched them with often-repeated delight: the scented freshness of the breeze that stirs before daybreak:

E quale annunziatrice degli albori
Aura di maggio muovesi ed olezza
Tutta impregnata dall' erba e da' fiori;
Tal mi sentì' un vento dar per mezza
La fronte;—*Purg.* 24.[1]

the chill of early morning (*Purg.* 19); the dawn stealing on, and the stars, one by one, fading "infino alla più bella" (*Parad.* 30); the brightness of the "trembling morning star"—

Par tremolando mattutina stella;—

the serenity of the dawn, the blue gradually gathering in the east, spreading over the brightening sky (*Parad.* 1); then succeeded by the orange tints—and Mars setting red, through the mist over the sea:

Ed ecco, qual sul presso del mattino
Per li grossi vapor Marte rosseggia

---

[1] As when, announcing the approach of day,
Impregnated with herbs and flowers of Spring,
Breathes fresh and redolent the air of May—
Such was the breeze that gently fann'd my head;
And I perceived the waving of a wing
Which all around ambrosial odours shed.—WRIGHT.

Giù nel ponente, sopra 'l suol marino,
Cotal m' apparve, s' io ancor lo veggia,
Un lume per lo mar venir sì ratto
Che 'l muover suo nessun volar pareggia ;—*Purg.* 2.[1]

the distant sea-beach quivering in the early light:

L' alba vinceva l' ora mattutina
Che fuggia innanzi, sì che di lontano
Conobbi *il tremolar della marina* ;—*Purg.* 1.[2]

the contrast of east and west at the moment of sun rise, and the sun appearing, clothed in mist:

Io vidi già nel cominciar del giorno
La parte oriental tutta rosata
E l' altro ciel di bel sereno adorno ;
E la faccia del sol nascere ombrata
Sì che per temperanza di vapori
L' occhio lo sostenea lungo fiato ;—*Purg.* 3.[3]

---

[1] When lo ! like Mars, in aspect fiery red
Seen through the vapour, when the morn is nigh
Far in the west above the briny bed,
So (might I once more see it) o'er the sea
A light approach'd with such rapidity,
Flies not the bird that might its equal be.—WRIGHT.

[2] Now 'gan the vanquish'd matin hour to flee ;
And seen from far, as onward came the day,
I recognised the trembling of the sea.—*Ibid.*

[3] Erewhile the eastern regions have I seen
At daybreak glow with roseate colours, and
The expanse beside all beauteous and serene ;

or breaking through it, and shooting his beams over the sky:

Di tutte parti saettava il giorno
Lo sol ch' avea con le saette conte
Di mezzo 'l ciel cacciato 'l Capricorno.—*Purg.* 2.[1]

But *light* in general is his special and chosen source of poetic beauty. No poet that we know has shown such singular sensibility to its varied appearances—has shown that he felt it in itself the cause of a distinct and peculiar pleasure, delighting the eye apart from form, as music delights the ear apart from words, and capable, like music, of definite character, of endless variety, and infinite meanings. He must have studied and dwelt upon it like music. His mind is charged with its effects and combinations, and they are rendered with a force, a brevity, a precision, a heedlessness and unconsciousness of ornament, an indifference to circumstance and detail; they flash out with a spontaneous readiness, a suitableness and felicity, which show the familiarity and grasp given only by daily observation, daily thought, daily

---

And the sun's face so shrouded at its rise,
And temper'd by the mists which overhung,
That I could gaze on it with stedfast eyes.—WRIGHT.

[1] On every side the sun shot forth the day,
And had already with his arrows bright
From the mid-heaven chased Capricorn away.—*Ibid.*

pleasure. Light everywhere—in the sky and earth and sea—in the star, the flame, the lamp, the gem—broken in the water, reflected from the mirror, transmitted pure through the glass, or coloured through the edge of the fractured emerald—dimmed in the mist, the halo, the deep water—streaming through the rent cloud, glowing in the coal, quivering in the lightning, flashing in the topaz and the ruby, veiled behind the pure alabaster, mellowed and clouding itself in the pearl—light contrasted with shadow—shading off and copying itself in the double rainbow, like voice and echo—light seen within light, as voice discerned within voice, "*quando una è ferma, e l' altra va e riede*"—the brighter "nestling" itself in the fainter—the purer set off on the less clear, "*come perla in bianca fronte*"—light in the human eye and face, displaying, figuring, and confounded with its expressions—light blended with joy in the eye:

luce
Come letizia in pupilla viva;

and in the smile:

Vincendo me col lume d' un sorriso;

joy lending its expression to light:

Quivi la donna mia vidi si lieta—
Che più lucente se ne fè il pianeta.

E se la *stella si cambio, e rise,*
Qual mi fec' io ;—*Parad.* 5.[1]

light from every source, and in all its shapes, illuminates, irradiates, gives its glory to the *Commedia.* The remembrance of our "serene life" beneath the "fair stars" keeps up continually the gloom of the *Inferno.* Light, such as we see it and recognise it, the light of morning and evening growing and fading, takes off from the unearthliness of the *Purgatorio;* peopled, as it is, by the undying, who, though suffering for sin, can sin no more, it is thus made like our familiar world, made to touch our sympathies as an image of our own purification in the flesh. And when he rises beyond the regions of earthly day, light, simple, unalloyed, unshadowed, eternal, lifts the creations of his thought above all affinity to time and matter; light never fails him, as the expression of the gradations of bliss; never reappears the same, never refuses the new shapes of his invention, never becomes confused or dim, though it is seldom thrown into distinct figure, and still more seldom *coloured.*

[1] Entered within the precincts of the light,
I saw my guide's fair countenance possest
With joy so great, the planet glow'd more bright.
And if the very star a smile displayed,
Well might I smile—to change by nature prone,
And varying still with each impression made.—WRIGHT.

Only once, that we remember, is the thought of colour forced on us; when the bright joy of heaven suffers change and eclipse, and deepens into red at the sacrilege of men.[1]

Yet his eye is everywhere, not confined to the beauty or character of the sky and its lights. His range of observation and largeness of interest prevent that line of imagery, which is his peculiar instrument and predilection, from becoming, in spite of its brightness and variety, dreamy and monotonous; prevent it from arming against itself sympathies which it does not touch. He has watched with equal attention, and draws with not less power, the occurrences and sights of Italian country life; the summer whirlwind sweeping over the plain—"*dinanzi polveroso va superbo*" (*Inf.* 9); the rain-storm of the Apennines (*Purg.* 5); the peasant's alternations of feeling in spring:

In quella parte del giovinetto anno
Che 'l sole i crin sotto l' Aquario tempra,
E già le notti al mezzo dì sen vanno;
Quando la brina in su la terra assempra
L' imagine di sua sorella bianca,
Ma poco dura alla sua penna tempra,
Lo villanello a cui la roba manca
Si leva e guarda, e vede la campagna
Biancheggiar tutta; ond'ei si batte l' anca;

[1] *Parad.* 27.

Ritorna a casa, e qua e là si lagna
Come 'l tapin che non sa che si faccia:
Poi riede e la speranza ringavagna
Veggendo 'l mondo aver cangiata faccia
In poco d' ora, e prende il suo vincastro
E fuor le pecorelle a pascer caccia:—*Inf.* 24.[1]

the manner in which sheep come out from the fold:

Come le pecorelle escon del chiuso
A una a due a tre, e l' altre stanno,
Timidette atterrando l' occhio e' l muso;
E ciò che fa la prima, e l' altre fanno,
Addossandosi a lei s' ella s' arresta
Semplici e quete, e lo 'mperchè non sanno:
Si vid' io muover a venir la testa
Di quella mandria fortunata allotta,

---

[1] In the new year, when Sol his tresses gay
Dips in Aquarius, and the tardy night
Divides her empire with the lengthening day—
When o'er the earth the hoar-frost pure and bright
Assumes the image of her sister white,
Then quickly melts before the genial light—
The rustic, now exhausted his supply,
Rises betimes—looks out—and sees the land
All white around, whereat he strikes his thigh—
Turns back—and grieving—wanders here and there,
Like one disconsolate and at a stand;
Then issues forth, forgetting his despair,
For lo! the face of nature he beholds
Changed on a sudden—takes his crook again,
And drives his flock to pasture from the folds.—WRIGHT.

Pudicà in faccia e nell' andare onesta.
Come color dinanzi vider rotta
La luce . . . .
Ristaro, e trasser se indietro alquanto,
E tutti gli altri che veniano appresso,
Non sappiendo il perchè, fero altrettanto.—*Purg.* 3.[1]

So with the beautiful picture of the goats upon the mountain, chewing the cud in the noontide heat and stillness, and the goatherd, resting on his staff and watching them—a picture which no traveller among the mountains of Italy or Greece can have missed, or have forgotten:

Quali si fanno ruminando manse
Le capre, *state rapide e proterve*
Sopra le cime avanti che sien pranse,

---

[1] And e'en as sheep forth issue from the fold,
By one, by two, by three—while all the rest
Stand timid, and to earth their noses hold;
And what the leader doth, they also do,
If chance she stop, behind her closely prest—
Simple and still—not knowing why: e'en so
I saw the leaders of this favoured race
Now move, now pause, as their advance they made,
Modest in look, and dignified in pace.
When intercepted on my right they found
The solar rays . . . .
They paused—and somewhat back their steps withdrew;
And all the others who behind them came,
Not knowing why, fell back some paces too.—WRIGHT.

Tacite al ombra mentre che 'l sol ferve,
Guardate dal pastor che 'n su la verga
Poggiato s' è, e lor poggiato serve.—*Purg.* 27.[1]

So again, with his recollections of cities: the crowd, running together to hear news (*Purg.* 2), or pressing after the winner of the game (*Purg.* 6); the blind men at the church doors, or following their guide through the throng (*Purg.* 13, 16); the friars walking along in silence, one behind another:

Taciti, soli, e senza compagnia
N' andavam, *l' un dinanzi, e l' altro dopo*
Come i frati minor vanno per via.—*Inf.* 23.[2]

He turns to account in his poem, the pomp and clamour of the host taking the field (*Inf.* 22); the devices of heraldry; the answering chimes of morning bells over the city;[3] the inventions and appliances

[1] Like goats that having over the crags pursued
Their wanton sports, now, quiet pass the time
In ruminating—sated with their food,
Beneath the shade, while glows the sun on high—
Watched by the goatherd with unceasing care,
As on his staff he leans, with watchful eye.—WRIGHT.

[2] Silent, apart, companionless we went,
The one before, the other close behind,
Like friars minor on their journey bent.—*Ibid.*

[3] Indi come orologio che ne chiami
Nell' ora che la sposa di Dio surge
A mattinar lo sposo perchè l' ami,

of art, the wheels within wheels of clocks (*Parad.* 24), the many-coloured carpets of the East (*Inf.* 17); music and dancing—the organ and voice in church:

> —Voce mista al dolce suono
> Che or sì or no s' intendon le parole,—*Purg.* 9.[1]

the lute and voice in the chamber (*Parad.* 20); the

Che l' una parte e l' altra tira ed urge
Tin tin sonando con si dolce nota
Che 'l ben disposto spirto d' amor turge;
Così vid' io la gloriosa ruota
Muoversi e render voce a voce, in tempra
Ed in dolcezza ch' esser non può nota
Se non colà dove 'l gioir s' insempra.—*Parad.* 10.

Then, like a clock that summons us away,
What time the spouse of God at matin hour
Hastes to her husband, for his love to pray,—
And one part urges on the other, sounding
Tin Tin in notes so sweet, that by its power
The soul is thrilled, with pious love abounding;
So I beheld the glorious circle move;
And with such sweet accord and harmony
Take up the song of praise, as none may prove,
Save where is joy through all eternity.

[1] As when the organ on some holy day
Blends with the voices of the sacred choir,
Which now swell loud, now melting die away.—WRIGHT

[More correctly rendered by Dean Plumptre:—

Such impress as it oft is wont to take,
When men their singing with the organ share,
For *now were heard, now not, the words they spake.*]

dancers preparing to begin,[1] or waiting to catch a new strain.[2] Or, again, the images of domestic life, the mother's ways to her child, reserved and reproving—"che al figlio par superba"—or cheering him with her voice, or watching him compassionately in the wandering of fever:

> Ond' ella, appresso d' un pio sospiro
> Gli occhi drizzò ver me, con quel sembiante
> Che madre fa sopra figliuol deliro.—*Parad.* 1.[3]

Nor is he less observant of the more delicate phenomena of mind, in its inward workings, and its connection with the body. The play of features, the involuntary gestures and attitudes of the passions,

[1] E come surge, e va, ed entra in ballo
Vergine lieta, sol per farne onore
Alla novizia, e non per alcun fallo.—*Parad.* 25.

And as a virgin, rising joyously,
Enters the dance, bent only on improving
The nuptial welcome—not through vanity.

[2] Donne mi parver, non da ballo sciolte,
Ma che s' arrestin tacite ascoltando
Fin che le nuove note hanno ricolte.—*Ibid.* 10.

Ladies they seemed, not from the dance set free,
But pausing for new notes, with fond desire,
Until they catch them, listening silently.—WRIGHT.

[3] With pitying sigh her eyes on me were thrown;
And hers was like a mother's gaze, intent
Upon the face of her delirious son.

the power of eye over eye, of hand upon hand, the charm of voice and expression, of musical sounds even when not understood—feelings, sensations, and states of mind which have a name, and others, equally numerous and equally common, which have none—these, often so fugitive, so shifting, so baffling and intangible, are expressed with a directness, a simplicity, a sense of truth at once broad and refined, which seized at once on the congenial mind of his countrymen, and pointed out to them the road which they have followed in art, unapproached as yet by any competitors.[1]

[1] For instance :—*thoughts upon thoughts, ending in sleep and dreams :*

Nuovo pensier dentro de me si mise,
Dal qual più altri nacquero e diversi :
E tanto d' uno in altro vaneggiai
Che gli occhi per vaghezza ricopersi,
E 'l pensamento in sogno trasmutai.—Purg. 18.
New thought was sudden waked within my breast,
Whence other thoughts of different kind arose :
And I so wandered on from theme to theme,
Mine eyes at last in rapture lost I close,
And change my meditation for a dream.—WRIGHT.

sleep stealing off when broken by light :

Come si frange il sonno, ove di butto
Nuova luce percuote 'l viso chiuso,
Che fratto guizza pria che muoja tutto.—Purg. 17.
As when a sudden and o'erpowering light,

And he has anticipated the latest schools of modern poetry, by making not merely nature, but

---

Strikes our closed eyes, and breaks upon our sleep,
Quivering a moment ere it takes its flight.

the shock of sudden awakening:

Come al lume acuto si disonna,

. . . . .

E lo svegliato ciò che vede abborre,
Sì nescia è la subita vigilia,
Finchè la stimativa nol soccorre.—*Parad.* 26.

And as through fervour of the piercing light

. . . . .

Is broken through the slumber of the night,
And the awakened one hates what he sees—
(So lost to sense of all around he is,
Till judgment re-illume his faculties).

uneasy feelings produced by sight or representation of something unnatural:

Come per sostentar solajo o tetto
Per mensola talvolta una figura
Si vede giunger le ginocchia al petto,
La qual fa del non ver vera rancura
Nascer a chi la vede; così fatti
Vid' io color.—*Purg.* 10.

As to support a roof or ceiling, oft
A figure doth a bracket's place supply,
The knees up-gathered to the breast aloft.
The unreal pain excites compassion true
In him who sees it; such when I explore
These forms minutely, they appear to view.

science tributary to a poetry with whose general aim and spirit it has little in common—tributary in its

---

blushing in innocent sympathy for others:

E come donna onesta che permane
Di se sicura, e *per l' altrui fallenza*
Pure ascoltando timida si fane:
Così Beatrice trasmutò sembianza.—*Parad.* 27.

And like a modest damsel, who not fearing
In her own self, yet wears a timid mien,
The story of another's shame but hearing;
Such change the look of Beatrice displayed.

asking and answering by looks only:

Volsi gli occhi agli occhi al signor mio;
Ond' elli m' assentì con lieto cenno
Ciò che chiedea la vista del disio.—*Ibid.* 19.

I bent my eyes on those of my dear lord,
Who to the strong desire that mine expressed
Rendered with joyful look a kind accord.

watching the effect of words:

Posto avea fine al suo ragionamento
L' alto dottore, ad attento guardava
Nella mia vista s' io parea contento.
Ed io, cui nuova sete ancor frugava,
Di fuor taceva e dentro dicea: forse
Lo troppo dimandar ch' io fo, li grava.
Ma quel padre verace, che s' accorse
Del timido voler che non s' apriva,
Parlando, di parlare ardir mi porse.—*Purg.* 18

His reasoning ended, my exalted guide
Attentively surveyed my countenance
To see if I were fully satisfied.

exact forms, even in its technicalities. He speaks of the Mediterranean Sea, not merely as a historian, or

---

And I, by further cravings now possest,
Spake not aloud, but said within: "Perchance
He by my constant questions is oppressed."
But that true father, who at once perceived
The timid wish I had not dared to tell,
Soon by his speech my fear to speak relieved.

Dante betraying Virgil's presence to Statius, by his involuntary smile:

Volser Virgilio a me queste parole
Con viso che tacendo dicea: "taci;"
Ma non può tutto la virtù che vuole;
Che riso e pianto son tanto seguaci
Alla passion da che ciascun si spicca,
Che men seguon voler ne' più veraci.
Io pur sorrisi, come l' uom ch' ammicca;
Perchè l' ombra si tacque, e riguardommi
Negli occhi ove 'l sembiante più si ficca.
E se tanto lavoro in bene assommi,
Disse, perchè la faccia tua testeso
Un lampeggiar a' un riso dimostrommi?—*Purg.* 21.

These words made Virgil turn to where I stood,
With look that silent said: "Be silent thou;"
But Virtue cannot all that Virtue would;
For in the wake of passion, smile and tear
So closely follow, that they least allow
The will to govern is the most sincere.
I smiled as one who winks: whereat the shade
Refrained from words, and fastened on mine eye,
In which more clearly is the soul pourtrayed.

an observer of its storms or its smiles, but as a geologist;[1] of light, not merely in its beautiful

---

Success, he said, reward thy good intent,
As these inform me, from thy features why
The lightning of a smile was lately sent.—WRIGHT.

smiles and words together:

Per le *sorrise parolette brevi.—Parad.* 1.
Those brief words accompanied with smiles.—CARY.

eye meeting eye:

Gli occhi ritorsi avanti
Dritti nel lume della dolce guida
Che sorridendo ardea negli occhi santi.—*Parad.* 3.
Called back mine eyes anon
Full on the orbs of my loved guide directed,
Which, as she smiled, with holy lustre shone.—WRIGHT.

Come si vede qui alcuna volta
L' affetto nella vista, s' ello è tanto
Che da lui sia tutta l' anima tolta:
Così nel fiammeggiar del fulgor santo
A cui mi volsi, conobbi la voglia
In lui di ragionarmi ancore alquanto.—*Parad.* 18.
And as sometimes, in this our mortal state,
We see affection pictured in the eyes,
Of power the soul entire to captivate.
So, in the effulgence of that holy flame
To which I turned, an ardent wish I saw
With me a further intercourse to claim.—WRIGHT.

gentleness of voice:

E cominciommi a dir soave e piana
Con angelica voce in sua favella.—*Inf.* 2.

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[1] *La maggior valle*, in che l' acqua si spandi.—*Parad.* 9.

appearances, but in its natural laws.[1] There is a charm, an imaginative charm to him, not merely in

---

And on mine ear in her own accents fell
Tones soft and sweet of angel harmony.—WRIGHT.

E come agli occhi miei si fe' più bella,
Così con voce più dolce e soave,
Ma non con questa moderna favella,
Dissemi;—*Parad.* 16.

And brighter as it grew before mine eyes,
So with a voice more soft and sweetly faint
(But not with that now used—of modern guise)
It answered— *Ibid.*

chanting:

Te lucis ante si divotamente
Le uscì di bocca e con si dolce note,
Che fece me a me uscir di mente.
E l' altre poi dolcemente e divote
Seguitar lei per tutto l' inno intero,
Avendo gli occhi alle superne ruote.—*Purg.* 8.

Te lucis ante with such deep devotion
Forth issued from her lips in notes so soft,
My soul was ravished with intense emotion.
Meanwhile the others, sweetly and devout,
Keeping their eyes upon the wheels aloft
Accompanied her voice the hymn throughout.
WRIGHT.

chanting blended with the sound of the organ:—Purg. 9. *Vid supra*, p. 151.

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[1] *E.g. Purg.* 15.

the sensible magnificence of the heavens, "in their silence, and light, and watchfulness," but in the system

---

voices in concert:

E come in voce voce si discerne
Quando una è ferma, e 'l altra va e riede.—Parad. 8.

And as distinctly voice from voice we hear,
When, one sustained, the other comes and goes.
WRIGHT.

attitudes and gestures: e.g. Beatrice addressing him:

Con atto e voce di spedito duce.—*Parad.* 30.

With gesture and with look commanding, she
Began— WRIGHT.

Sordello eyeing the travellers:

Venimmo a lei: o anima Lombarda,
Come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa,
E nel muover degli occhi onesta e tarda.
Ella non ci diceva alcuna cosa,
Ma lasciavane gir, solo guardando,
A guisa di leon quando si posa.—*Purg.* 6.

To him advanced we. What disdain and pride,
O Lombard soul, thy countenance bespoke!
Thine eyes, how moved they, slow and dignified.
To us the spirit not a word addressed,
Letting us pass, and deigning but a look—
Like to a lion, when he lies at rest.—WRIGHT.

the angel moving "dry-shod" over the Stygian pool:

Dal volto rimovea quell' aer grasso
Menando la sinistra innanzi spesso,
E sol di quell' angoscia parea lasso.
Ben m' accorsi ch' egli era del ciel messo,
E volsimi al maestro; e quei fe' segno

of Ptolemy and the theories of astrology; and he delights to interweave the poetry of feeling and of the outward sense with the grandeur—so far as he knew it—of order, proportion, measured magnitudes, the relations of abstract forces, displayed on such a scene as the material universe, as if he wished to show that imagination in its boldest flight was not afraid of the company of the clear and subtle intellect.

Indeed the real never daunts him. It is his leading principle of poetic composition, to draw out of things the poetry which is latent in them, either

> Ch' io stessi cheto ed inchinassi ed esso.
> Ahi quanto mi parea pien di disdegno.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Poi si rivolse per la strada lorda,
> E non fe' motto a noi, ma fe, sembiante
> D' uomo cui altra cura stringa e morde
> Che quella di colui che gli è davante.—*Inf.* 9.
>
> The heavy air he from his visage cleared,
> Waving the left hand oft his face before,
> And weary with that single toil appeared.
> Heaven's messenger he was, I plainly saw,
> And to the master turned: whereat he straight
> Made sign that I should bend in silent awe.
> Ah! what disdain, methought, his looks disclosed.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Then back he turned along the filthy shore,
> Nor spoke a word; but seemed like one tormented
> By other care and other trouble more
> Than by the thought of him within his view.—WRIGHT.

essentially, or as they are portions, images, or reflexes of something greater—not to invest them with a poetical semblance, by means of words which bring with them poetical associations, and have received a general poetical stamp. Dante has few of those indirect charms which flow from the subtle structure and refined graces of language—none of that exquisitely-fitted and self-sustained mechanism of choice words of the Greeks—none of that tempered and majestic amplitude of diction, which clothes, like the folds of a royal robe, the thoughts of the Latins—none of that abundant play of fancy and sentiment, soft or grand, in which the later Italian poets delighted. Words with him are used sparingly, never in play—never because they carry with them poetical recollections—never for their own sake; but because they are instruments which will give the deepest, clearest, sharpest stamp of that image which the poet's mind, piercing to the very heart of his subject, or seizing the characteristic feature which to other men's eyes is confused and lost among others accidental and common, draws forth in severe and living truth. Words will not always bend themselves to his demands on them; they make him often uncouth, abrupt, obscure. But he is too much in earnest to heed uncouthness; and his power over language is too great to allow uncertainty as to what he means,

to be other than occasional. Nor is he a stranger to the utmost sweetness and melody of language. But it appears, unsought for and unlaboured, the spontaneous and inevitable obedience of the tongue and pen to the impressions of the mind; as grace and beauty, of themselves, "command and guide the eye" of the painter, who thinks not of his hand but of them. All is in character with the absorbed and serious earnestness which pervades the poem; there is no toying, no ornament, that a man in earnest might not throw into his words;—whether in single images, or in pictures, like that of the Meadow of the Heroes (*Inf.* 4), or the angel appearing in hell to guide the poet through the burning city (*Inf.* 9)—or in histories, like those of Count Ugolino, or the life of St. Francis (*Parad.* 11)—or in the dramatic scenes like the meeting of the poets Sordello and Virgil (*Purg.* 6), or that one, unequalled in beauty, where Dante himself, after years of forgetfulness and sin, sees Beatrice in glory, and hears his name, never but once pronounced during the vision, from her lips.[1]

[1] Io vidi già nel cominciar del giorno
La parte oriental tutta rosata,
E l' altro ciel di bel sereno adorno,
E la faccia del sol nascere ombrata,
Sì che per temperanza di vapori
L' occhio lo sostenea lunga fiata;
Così dentro una nuvola di fiori,

But this, or any other array of scenes and images, might be matched from poets of a far lower order

---

Che dalle mani angeliche saliva,
E ricadeva giù dentro e di fuori,
Sovra candido vel cinta d' oliva
Donna m' apparve sotto verde manto
Vestita di color di fiamma viva.
E lo spirito mio, che già cotanto
Tempo era stato che alla sua presenza
Non era di stupor, tremando, affranto.
Senza degli occhi aver più conoscenza,
Per occulta virtù, che da lei mosse,
D' antico amor senti' la gran potenza.

. . . . .

Volsimi alla sinistra col rispitto,
Col quale il fantolin corre alla mamma,
Quando ha paura, o quando egli è afflitto,
Per dicere a Virgilio: Men che dramma
Di sangue m' è rimasa, che non tremi:
Conosco i segni dell' antica fiamma.
Ma Virgilio n' avea lasciati scemi
Di se, Virgilio dolcissimo padre,
Virgilio, a cui per mia salute diemi:

. . . . .

Dante, perchè Virgilio se ne vada,
Non piangere anche, non piangere ancora
Che pianger ti convien per altra spada.

. . . . .

Regalmente nell' atto ancor proterva
Continuò, come colui che dice,
E il più caldo parlar diretro serva,
Guardami ben: ben son, ben son Beatrice:

than Dante: and to specimens which might be brought together of his audacity and extravagance,

---

Come degnasti d' accedere al monte?
Non sapei tu, che qui è l' uom felice?—*Purg.* 30.

But extracts can give but an imperfect notion of this grand and touching canto.

Erewhile the eastern regions have I seen
At day-break glow with roseate colours, and
The expanse beside all beauteous and serene;
And the sun's face so shrouded at its rise,
And temper'd by the mists which overhung,
That I could gaze on it with steadfast eyes;—
E'en so, encompass'd in a cloud of flowers,
Which upward by angelic hands were flung,
And all about the chariot fell in showers—
In veil of white, with olive chaplet bound,
A Maid appear'd, beneath a mantle green,
With hue of living flame enrobed around.
And now my spirit (which for many a day,
Unused to feel her presence, had not been
O'ermaster'd by sensations of dismay)
Felt, though she was not fully manifest,
(Such secret virtue from her person flow'd)
How strong the love that erst my soul possess'd.
Soon as mine eye perceived that glorious ray,
With which in former times my bosom glow'd
Ere boyhood yet had wholly pass'd away,
I turn'd unto the left,—e'en like a child,
That to its mother runs with panting breast,
When hurt, or into dangerous paths beguiled—
To say to Virgil: "Flows not through my frame
One drop of blood that trembles not; confest

no parallel could be found except among the lowest. We cannot, honestly, plead the barbarism of the time as his excuse. That, doubtless, contributed largely to them; but they were the faults of the man. In

---

Are all the traces of my ancient flame."
But Virgil now had vanish'd from my side—
Virgil—my father, most revered, most dear—
Virgil—on whom for safety I relied.
Nor could the sight of all in evil hour
Lost by our primal mother, check the tear,
Which o'er my cheeks now flow'd in ample shower.
" Dante, weep not that Virgil leaves thee here—
Weep not as yet; for know, another sword
Of sharper edge shall cause thee many a tear."
E'en as an Admiral with searching ken
Inspects his vessels when he comes aboard,
And by his look encourages his men;
So on the left of the celestial car
(When at the sound of mine own name I turn'd,
Which here I am compell'd to register)
The Lady, whom beneath a drapery
Of flowers angelical I late discern'd,
Cast from beyond the stream her eyes on me;
Although the veil, that from her brow descended,
Girt by Minerva's leaf around her head,
From clearer view her beauteous form defended.
With regal air and look, wherein disdain
Was pictured still, proceeding thus, she said
(Like one who doth her bitterest taunt retain)—
" Yes, I am Beatrice; regard me well:
And hast thou deign'd at last to ascend the mount,
Where joys unspeakable for ever dwell?"—WRIGHT.

another age, their form might have been different; yet we cannot believe so much of time, that it would have tamed Dante. Nor can we wish it. It might have made him less great: and his greatness can well bear its own blemishes, and will not less meet its honour among men, because they can detect its due kindred to themselves.

The greatness of his work is not in its details—to be made or marred by them. It is the greatness of a comprehensive and vast conception, sustaining without failure the trial of its long and hazardous execution, and fulfilling at its close the hope and promise of its beginning; like the greatness—which we watch in its course with anxious suspense, and look back upon when it is secured by death, with deep admiration—of a perfect life. Many a surprise, many a difficulty, many a disappointment, many a strange reverse and alternation of feelings, attend the progress of the most patient and admiring reader of the *Commedia;* as many as attend on one who follows the unfolding of a strong character in life. We are often shocked when we were prepared to admire—repelled, when we came with sympathy; the accustomed key fails at a critical moment—depths are revealed which we cannot sound, mysteries which baffle and confound us. But the check is for a time—the gap and chasm does not dissever. Haste is even an evidence of life

—the brief word, the obscure hint, the unexplained, the unfinished, or even the unachieved, are the marks of human feebleness, but are also among those of human truth. The unity of the whole is unimpaired. The strength which is working it out, though it may have at times disappointed us, shows no hollowness or exhaustion. The surprise of disappointment is balanced—there is the surprise of unimagined excellence. Powers do more than they promised; and that spontaneous and living energy, without which neither man nor poet can be trusted, and which showed its strength even in its failures, shows it more abundantly in the novelties of success—by touching sympathies which have never been touched before, by the unconstrained freshness with which it meets the proverbial and familiar, by the freedom with which it adjusts itself to a new position or an altered task—by the completeness, unstudied and instinctive, with which it holds together dissimilar and uncongenial materials, and forces the most intractable, the most unaccustomed to submission, to receive the colour of the whole—by its orderly and unmistakable onward march, and its progress, as in height, so in what corresponds to height. It was one and the same man, who rose from the despair, the agony, the vivid and vulgar horrors of the *Inferno*, to the sense and imagination of certainty, sinlessness, and joy ineffable

—the same man whose power and whose sympathies failed him not, whether discriminating and enumerating, as if he had gone through them all, the various forms of human suffering, from the dull, gnawing sense of the loss of happiness, to the infinite woes of the wrecked and ruined spirit, and the coarser pangs of the material flesh; or dwelling on the changeful lights and shades of earnest repentance, in its hard, but not unaided or ungladdened struggle, and on that restoration to liberty and peace which can change even this life into paradise, and reverse the doom which made sorrow our condition, and laughter and joy unnatural and dangerous—the penalty of that first fault, which

> In pianto ed in affanno
> Cambiò onesto riso e dolce giuoco :—*Purg.* 28.[1]

or rising finally above mortal experience, to imagine the freedom of the saints and the peace of eternity. In this consists the greatness of his power. It is not necessary to read through the *Commedia* to see it — open it where we please, we see that he is on his way, and whither he is going; episode and digression share in the solemnity of the general order.

[1] Chosing a life of sorrow and disgrace
Instead of virtuous smiles and gladsome sport.—WRIGHT.

And his greatness was more than that of power. That reach and play of sympathy ministered to a noble wisdom, which used it thoughtfully and consciously for a purpose to which great poetry had never yet been applied, except in the mouth of prophets. Dante was a stern man, and more than stern, among his fellows. But he has left to those who never saw his face an inheritance the most precious; he has left them that which, reflecting and interpreting their minds, does so, not to amuse, not to bewilder, not to warp, not to turn them in upon themselves in distress or gloom or selfishness; not merely to hold up a mirror to nature; but to make them true and make them hopeful. Dark as are his words of individuals, his thoughts are not dark or one-sided about mankind; his is no cherished and perverse severity—his faith is too large, too real, for such a fault. He did not write only the *Inferno*. And the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* are not an afterthought, a feebler appendix and compensation, conceived when too late, to a finished whole, which has taken up into itself the poet's real mind. Nowhere else in poetry of equal power is there the same balanced view of what man is, and may be; nowhere so wide a grasp shown of his various capacities, so strong a desire to find a due place and function for all his various dispositions. Where he stands con-

trasted in his idea of human life with other poets, who have been more powerful exponents of its separate sides, is in his large and truthful comprehensiveness. Fresh from the thought of man's condition as a whole, fresh from the thought of his goodness, his greatness, his power, as well as of his evil, his mind is equally in tune when rejoicing over his restoration, as when contemplating the ruins of his fall. He never lets go the recollection that human life, if it grovels at one end in corruption and sin, and has to pass through the sweat and dust and disfigurement of earthly toil, has throughout, compensations, remedies, functions, spheres innumerable of profitable activity, sources inexhaustible of delight and consolation—and at the other end a perfection which cannot be named. No one ever measured the greatness of man in all its forms with so true and yet with so admiring an eye, and with such glowing hope, as he who has also portrayed so awfully man's littleness and vileness. And he went farther—no one who could understand and do homage to greatness in man, ever drew the line so strongly between greatness and goodness, and so unhesitatingly placed the hero of this world only—placed him in all his magnificence, honoured with no timid or dissembling reverence—at the distance of worlds, below the place of the lowest saint.

Those who know the *Divina Commedia* best, will best know how hard it is to be the interpreter of such a mind; but they will sympathise with the wish to call attention to it. They know, and would wish others also to know, not by hearsay, but by experience, the power of that wonderful poem. They know its austere, yet subduing beauty; they know what force there is, in its free and earnest and solemn verse, to strengthen, to tranquillise, to console. It is a small thing that it has the secret of Nature and Man; that a few keen words have opened their eyes to new sights in earth, and sea, and sky; have taught them new mysteries of sound; have made them recognise, in distinct image or thought, fugitive feelings, or their unheeded expression, by look, or gesture, or motion; that it has enriched the public and collective memory of society with new instances, never to be lost, of human feeling and fortune; has charmed ear and mind by the music of its stately march, and the variety and completeness of its plan. But, besides this, they know how often its seriousness has put to shame their trifling, its magnanimity their faintheartedness, its living energy their indolence, its stern and sad grandeur rebuked low thoughts, its thrilling tenderness overcome sullenness and assuaged distress, its strong faith quelled despair and soothed perplexity, its vast grasp imparted the sense of har-

mony to the view of clashing truths. They know how often they have found, in times of trouble, if not light, at least that deep sense of reality, permanent, though unseen, which is more than light can always give—in the view which it has suggested to them of the judgments and the love of God.[1]

[1] It is necessary to state, that these remarks were written before we had seen the chapter on Dante in *Italy, Past and Present*, by L. Mariotti. Had we become acquainted with it earlier, we should have had to refer to it often, in the way of acknowledgment, and as often in the way of strong protest.

[1850.]

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

[WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was born April 7, 1770, at Cockermouth, a town on the edge of the Cumberland highlands. His father was agent to Lord Lowther, and came of an old north-country stock. Both father and mother died in his boyhood; his mother first, his father when he was fourteen. He went to school in the neighbourhood, at Hawkshead, and his school days were days of much liberty, both in playing and reading. In October 1787 he went to St. John's College, Cambridge. But he made no mark at the university, and in January 1791 he took his degree and left Cambridge. Like many of his generation he was filled with enthusiasm for the French Revolution, and after taking his degree he resided for more than a year in France. The Reign of Terror drove him home again; he came to London, unsettled in his plans; he was in Dorsetshire (1796), then at Alfoxden in the Somersetshire Quantocks, where he saw much of S. T. Coleridge. In 1793 he published a volume of poems, and in 1798 appeared, at Bristol, the first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, intended to be a joint work of Coleridge and Wordsworth, but to which Coleridge only contributed *The Ancient Mariner*, and two or three other pieces. The two friends went to Germany at the end of 1798, and Wordsworth, with his sister, spent the winter at Goslar. When he returned to England, he also returned for good to his

own northern mountains and lakes. He settled, with his sister, near Grasmere, meaning to give himself to poetical composition as the business of his life, and in 1800 published the second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson, and finally fixed his home in the lakes, though it was not till several years afterwards (1813) that he took up his abode in the place henceforth connected with his name, Rydal Mount. During all the early part of the century he was very busy. Besides shorter pieces, suggested by the incidents or feelings of the day, he was at work from 1799 to 1805 on a poem, *The Prelude*, describing the history and growth of his own mind, and intended to be an introduction to the greater philosophical poem which he was already meditating, *The Recluse*—in part, and only in part, realised in *The Excursion*. *The Excursion* was published in 1814. Composition took many shapes in the various collections published by Wordsworth, from the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 down to his death. But especially his poetical efforts took the shape of the sonnet. Large collections of sonnets marked the working of his thoughts and feelings on certain groups of subjects, or were the memorials of scenes which had interested him. He once, and early in his career, attempted the drama (*The Borderers*, 1795-96), but with little success. From the first he took a keen interest in all political and social questions, and he was an impassioned and forcible prose writer. His life was a long one, of steady work and much happiness. He died April 23, 1850, at Rydal Mount.]

WORDSWORTH was, first and foremost, a philosophical thinker; a man whose intention and purpose of life it was to think out for himself, faithfully and seriously, the questions concerning "Man and Nature and Human Life." He tried to animate and invest

with imaginative light the convictions of religious, practical, homely but high-hearted England, as Goethe thought out in his poetry the speculations and sceptical moods of inquisitive and critical Germany. He was a poet, because the poetical gift and faculty had been so bestowed on him that he could not fail in one way or another to exercise it: but in deliberate purpose and plan he was a poet, because poetry offered him the richest, the most varied, and the completest method of reaching truth in the matters which interested him, and of expressing and recommending its lessons, of "making them dwellers in the hearts of men." "Every great poet," he said, "is a teacher; I wish either to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Not like poets writing simply to please; not like Lucretius or Pope, casting other men's thought into ingenious or highly-coloured or epigrammatic verse; not like Homer or Shakspere or Milton, standing in impersonal distance from their wonderful creations; not like Shelley, full of philosophic ideas, but incapable, from his wild nature, of philosophic steadiness of thought; not even like poets who write to give an outlet to their sense of the beauty, the strangeness, the pathetic mystery of the world, to unburden their misgivings, to invite sympathy with their sorrows or hopes,—Wordsworth, with all his imagination, and in his moments of

highest rapture, has a practical sense of a charge committed to him. He is as much in earnest as a prophet, and he holds himself as responsible for obedience to his call and for its fulfilment, as a prophet. "To console the afflicted; *to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier;* to teach the young and the gracious of every age *to see, to think, and feel,* and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous,"—this is his own account of the purpose of his poetry. (Letter to Lady Beaumont, May 1807.) He has given the same account in the Preface to *The Excursion.*

> Not Chaos, not
> The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
> Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
> By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
> As fall upon us often when we look
> Into our minds, into the mind of man—
> My haunt, and the main region of my song.
> —Beauty—a living presence of the earth,
> Surpassing the most fair ideal forms
> Which craft of delicate spirits hath composed
> From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;
> Pitches her tents before me as I move,
> An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves
> Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
> Sought in the Atlantic main—*why should they be*
> *A history only of departed things,*
> *Or a mere fiction of what never was?*

For the discerning intellect of man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
—I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation :—*and, by words*
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures ; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external world
Is fitted :—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external world is fitted to the mind ;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish :—this is our high argument.

Wordsworth's poetry and his idea of the office of poetry must be traced, like many other remarkable things, to the French Revolution. He very early, even in his boyhood, became aware of that sympathy with external nature, and of that power of discriminating insight into the characteristic varieties of its beauty and awfulness, which afterwards so strongly marked his writings. "I recollect distinctly," he says of a description in one of his early poems, "the very

spot where this struck me. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which have been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, and I made a resolution to supply in some measure the deficiency." We have abundant evidence how he kept his purpose.

While Wordsworth was at Cambridge, the French Revolution was beginning. The contagion of the great ideas which it proclaimed caught him as it also laid hold on so many among the nobler spirits of the young generation. To him at that time, as he tells us himself,

> The whole earth
> The beauty wore of promise; that which sets
> The budding rose above the rose full blown.

The wonder, the sympathy, the enthusiasm which swept him and them away like a torrent, though in his case the torrent's course was but a short one, left ineffaceable marks on his character and his writings. He was not at first so easily shocked as others were at the excesses of the revolution. His stern North-country nature could bear and approve much terrible retribution for the old wrongs of the poor and the weak at the hands of nobles and kings. In his *Apology for the French Revolution*, 1793, he sneered at Bishop Watson for the importance which the Bishop attached

to "the personal sufferings of the late royal martyr," and for joining in the "idle cry of modish lamentation which has resounded from the court to the cottage"; and he boldly accepted the doctrine that in a time of revolution, which cannot be a time of liberty, "political virtues are developed at the expense of moral ones." But though the guillotine and the revolutionary tribunal had not daunted him, he recoiled from the military despotism and the fever of conquest in which they ended. The changes in his fundamental principles, in his thoughts of man and his duties, were not great: the change in his application of them and in his judgment of the men, the parties, the institutions, the measures, by which they were to be guarded and carried out, was great indeed. The hopes and affections which revolutionary France had so deeply disappointed were transferred to what was most ancient, most historic, most strongly rooted by custom and usage, in traditional and unreformed England. With characteristic courage he never cared to apologise for a political change which was as complete and striking as a change to a new religion. He scarcely attempted directly to explain it. He left it to tell its own story in his poetical creations, and in the elaborate pictures of character, his own and others,' inserted into his longer works, *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. But he was not a man

to change with half a heart. He left behind him for ever all the beliefs and anticipations and illusions which, like spells, had bound him to Jacobin France. He turned away from it in permanent and strong disgust, and settled down into the sturdy English Tory patriot of the beginning of the century.

But this unreserved and absorbing interest in the wonderful ideas and events of the French Revolution, transient as it was, had the effect upon him which great interruptions of the common course of things and life have on powerful natures. They were a call and a strain on his intellect and will, first in taking them in, then in judging, sifting, accepting or refusing them, which drew forth to the full all that he had of strength and individual character. But for that, he might have been, and doubtless would have been, the poet of nature, a follower, but with richer gifts, of Thomson, Akenside, perhaps Cowper. But it was the trial and the struggle which he went through, amid the hopes and overthrows of the French Revolution, which annealed his mind to its highest temper, which gave largeness to his sympathies and reality and power to his ideas.

Every one knows that Wordsworth's early poetry was received with a shout of derision, such as, except in the case of Keats, has never attended the first appearance of a great poet. Every one knows, too,

that in a quarter of a century it was succeeded by a growth of profound and enthusiastic admiration, which, though it has been limited by the rise of new forms of deep and powerful poetry, is still far from being spent or even reduced, though it is expressed with more discrimination than of old, in all who have a right to judge of English poetry.

This was the inevitable result of the characteristic qualities of Wordsworth's genius, though for a time the quarrel between the poet and his critics was aggravated by accidental and temporary circumstances. Wordsworth is destined, if any poet is, to be immortal; but immortality does not mean popularity. That in Wordsworth which made one class of readers find in him beauty, grandeur, and truth, which they had never found before, will certainly tell on the same class in future years:

> What he has loved,
> Others will love, and he will teach them how.

But mankind is deeply divided in its sympathies and tastes; and for a large portion of it, not merely of those who read, but of those who create and govern opinion, that which Wordsworth loved and aimed at and sought to represent will always be the object, not only of indifference but of genuine dislike. Add to this that Wordsworth's genius, though great, and

noble, and lofty, was in a marked way limited, and that in his own exposition and defence of his view of poetry he was curiously and unfortunately one-sided and inadequate, and provokingly stiff and dogmatic. This, of course, only affected an extinct controversy. But the controversy marked at once the power and the bold novelty of Wordsworth's attempt to purify and exalt English poetry. Wordsworth was, and felt himself to be, a discoverer, and like other great discoverers, his victory was in seeing by faith things which were not yet seen, but which were obvious, or soon became so, when once shown. He opened a new world of thought and enjoyment to Englishmen; his work formed an epoch in the intellectual and moral history of the race. But for that very reason he had, as Coleridge said, like all great artists, to create the taste by which he was to be relished, to teach the art by which he was to be seen and judged. And people were so little prepared for the thorough and systematic way in which he searched out what is deepest or highest or subtlest in human feeling under the homeliest realities, that not being able to understand him they laughed at him. Nor was he altogether without fault in the misconceptions which occasioned so much ridicule and scorn.

How did he win this deep and lasting admiration? What was it in him which exposed him not merely

to the mocks of the scorner but to the dislike of the really able men who condemned him?

That Wordsworth possessed poetical power of the very highest order could be doubted by no one who had read the poem which concluded the first volume of the fiercely attacked *Lyrical Ballads*—the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey.* That which places a man high among poets, force and originality of thought, vividness and richness of imagination, command over the instrument of language, in its purity, its beauty, and its majesty, could not be, and was never, denied. But this alone does not explain what is distinctive and characteristic in what called forth so much enthusiasm, and such an outcry of disapprobation.

What was special in Wordsworth was the penetrating power of his perceptions of poetical elements, and his fearless reliance on the simple forces of expression, in contrast to the more ornate ones. He had an eye to see these elements, where—I will not say no one had seen or felt them, but where no one appears to have recognised that they had seen or felt them. He saw that the familiar scene of human life, —nature, as affecting human life and feeling, and man as the fellow-creature of nature, but also separate and beyond it in faculties and destiny—had not yet rendered up even to the mightiest of former poets all that they had in them to touch the human heart.

And he accepted it as his mission to open the eyes and widen the thoughts of his countrymen, and to teach them to discern in the humblest and most unexpected forms the presence of what was kindred to what they had long recognised as the highest and greatest.

Wordsworth's poetry was not only a powerful but a conscious and systematic appeal to that craving for deep truth and reality which had been gathering way ever since the French Revolution so terribly tore asunder the old veils of conventionality and custom. Truth is a necessary element in all good poetry, and there had been good poetry in the century before Wordsworth. But in Wordsworth the moral judgment and purpose of the man were joined to the poet's instinct and art; and he did, as the most sacred and natural of duties, what he would anyhow have done from taste and for his pleasure. When that inflexible loyalty to truth which was the prime condition of all his writings—not mere literal truth, but the truth which could only be reached by thought and imagination,—when this had been taken in, it was soon seen what an amazing view it opened of the new riches and wonders of the world, a scene of discovery which Wordsworth was far from exhausting. It was a contrast, startling all and baffling many, to the way in which, since Shakspere and Milton,

poetry had been content to skim the surface of the vast awful tracts of life and nature, dealing with their certainties and riddles, with their beauty and their terror, under the guidance of sentiments put on for the most part like a stage dress, and in language which seemed not to belong to the world which we know. Thomson, Gray, and Burns, Wordsworth's immediate predecessors, had discovered, but only partially, the extent and significance of the faith which Wordsworth accepted and proclaimed in its length and breadth and height and depth, that Truth, in its infinite but ever self-consistent forms, is the first law of poetry. From his time, the eyes of readers, and the eyes of writers, have been opened; and whatever judgment they may pass on his own poetry or his theories, they have followed both as critics and as composers, in the path which he opened.

Hence his selection of subjects. He began with nature, as in the *Evening Walk* and the *Descriptive Sketches*. He had early and well learned his lesson of nature—learned to watch and note in her that, to which other eyes were blind, of expression and novelty in common sights. A habit was formed of indefatigable observation, like that which was the basis of Turner's power. And to a mind thus trained the scenes through which he passed, and among which his life was spent, furnished never-cloying food.

His continental journeys left deep impressions upon him; these impressions were answered by those of his home. The "power of hills was on him"; the music of waters was in his ears; light and darkness wove their spells for him. Looking to the same end as Turner, and working in the same spirit, he, with Turner, was a discoverer in the open face of nature: working apart from one another, these two mighty "Lords of the eye," seized and grasped what had always been visible yet never seen, and gave their countrymen capacities of perception and delight hardly yet granted to others. But as his mind grew, Nature, great as was her power, "fell back into a second place," and became important to him chiefly as the stage of man's action, and allied with his ideas, his passions and affections. And Man was interesting to him only in his essential nature, only *as man.* History had little value for him, except as it revealed character: and character had no interest unless, besides power or splendour, it had in it what appealed to human sympathies or human indulgence. For a Napoleon, with all his magnificence, he had nothing but loathing. Where he found truth, noble and affecting,—not bare literal fact, but reality informed and aglow with the ideas and forms of the imagination, and so raised by it to the power of an object of our spiritual nature,—he recognised no differences

of high and low. In the same way as he saw greatness in the ideal histories of Venice and Switzerland, and in the legends of Rome, even if they were fictions, so he saw greatness, the greatness of human affections and of the primary elements of human character, in the fortunes and the sufferings of *Michael* and the *Leech gatherer*. He was very bold for his time, and took all consequences, which were severe enough, when he insisted that the whole range of the beautiful, the pathetic, the tragic, the heroic, were to be found in common lowly life, as truly as in the epic and the drama, or in the grand legends of national history; when he proclaimed that

> Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth.

He claimed for *Lucy Gray*, for the "miserable mother by the *Thorn*," for the desolate maniac nursing her infant, the same pity which we give to Lear and Cordelia or to "the dark sorrows of the line of Thebes." Not in play but in deepest earnest he dwelt on the awfulness, the wonder, the sacredness of childhood: it furnished in his hands the subject, not only of touching ballads, but of one of the most magnificent lyrical poems—the ode on *Immortality*. He was convinced that if people would but think and be fair with themselves, they would not merely be moved by

humble tragedies, like *Michael* and the *Brothers*, but would feel that there was as much worthy of a poet's serious art in the agonies of the mother of the *Idiot Boy*, and the terrors of *Peter Bell*, as in the "majestic pains" of *Laodamia* and *Dion*. He has summed up his poetical doctrine with all his earnest solemnity in the thirteenth book of the *Prelude*:

> Here might I pause, and bend in reverence
> To Nature, and the power of human minds,
> *To men as they are men within themselves.*
> How oft high service is performed within,
> When all the external man is rude in show,—
> Not like a temple rich with pomp and gold,
> But a mere mountain chapel, that protects
> Its simple worshippers from sun and shower.
> Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these,
> If future years mature me for the task,
> Will I record the praises, making verse
> Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth
> And sanctity of passion speak of these,
> That justice may be done, obeisance paid
> Where it is due: thus haply shall I teach,
> Inspire, through unadulterated ears
> Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope—my theme
> No other than the very heart of man,
> As found among the best of those who live,
> Not unexalted by religious faith,
> Nor uninformed by books, good books, though few,
> In Nature's presence: *thence may I select*
> *Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight;*

And miserable love, that is not pain
To hear of, for the glory that redounds
Therefrom to human kind, and what we are.

. . . . .

Nature for all conditions wants not power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
Grandeur upon the very humblest face
Of human life. I felt that the array
Of act and circumstance, and visible form,
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
What passion makes them; that meanwhile the forms,
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,
That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him; although the works
Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own;
And that the genius of the Poet hence
May boldly take his way among mankind
Wherever Nature leads; that he hath stood
By Nature's side among the men of old,
And so shall stand for ever.

All this doctrine was strange to his age; it has ceased to be so to ours. In various ways and with varying merit, Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot, and a crowd of writers, poets and novelists, have searched out the *motifs* of the highest poetry in the humblest lives, and have taught the lesson that the real greatness and littleness of human life are not to be measured by the standards of fashion and pride. What made Wordsworth different from other popular

poets, and made him great, was a puzzle and a paradox at first in his own time; it is but a commonplace in ours. "It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought: the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying, the objects observed; and, above all, the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world, around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops. To find no contradiction in the union of old and new; to contemplate the Ancient of Days and all His works with feelings as fresh as if all had then sprung forth at the first creative fiat;—characterises the mind that feels the riddle of the world, and may help to unravel it. To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which every day for perhaps forty years have made familiar:

> With sun and moon and stars throughout the year,
> And man and woman—

this is the character and privilege of genius." (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, c. iv.)

Thus his range of materials was very large; his extensive scale of interests gave him great variety;

like his own skylark, he soars to the heavens, and drops into a lowly nest; and as the wing sometimes flags, and the eye is wearied, his work was unequal, and there was sometimes want of proportion in his subject and his treatment of it. But his principles of treatment, though he was not altogether happy in his exposition of them, were in accordance with his general idea of poetry. "I have at all times," he says, "endeavoured to look steadily at my subject." Where he succeeded—and no man can always in thought and imagination see what he wants to see—there was the fire and energy and life of truth, stamping all his words, governing his music and his movement, his flow or his rush. There is always the aim, the scrupulous, fastidious aim at direct expression—at beautiful, suggestive, forcible, original expression: but first of all at direct expression. This he called, somewhat oddly, restricting himself to the language of common life, in opposition to so-styled "poetic diction." Happily he was inconsistent with his own theory. He showed with Burns how far deep down the pathetic and the tender go in common life, and how its language can be made by cunning artists to minister to their expression: but there are regions in poetry of glory and nobleness and splendour where Burns never came, and there Wordsworth showed that he was master of a richer and subtler

wealth of words than common life supplies. But in his most fiery moments of inspiration and enthusiasm he never allowed himself to relax his hold on reality and truth: as he would scorn to express in poetry any word or feeling which was not genuine and natural, any sentiment or impulse short of or beyond the actual impression which caused them, so with the most jealous strictness he measured his words. He gave them their full swing if they answered to force and passion; but he watched them all the same, with tender but manly severity. Hence with his power and richness of imagination, and his full command over all the resources of voice and ear, an austere purity and plainness and nobleness marked all that he wrote, and formed a combination as distinct as it was uncommon. To purity, purity of feeling, pure truthfulness of expression, he is never untrue. In the wild excitement, or the lawless exaggeration, as in the self-indulgence and foulness of passion, he will recognise no subject of true poetic art. Keenly alive to beauty, and deeply reverencing it, he puts purity and the severity of truth above beauty. With his eager instincts of joy, it is only the joy of the pure-hearted that he acknowledges.

Wordsworth's great poetical design was carried out, first in collections of short pieces, such as those of his earlier volumes, the *Lyrical Ballads*, and the

Poems of 1807; then in a great mass of Sonnets, varying from some of the grandest in the language to some very commonplace; but as a whole, considering their number,—there are between four and five hundred of them,—a collection of great nobleness and wonderful finish: and finally in the long poem of *The Excursion*, itself a fragment of a greater projected whole, *The Recluse*. *The Excursion* was published in 1814, and it gave the key to all his poetical work. From that time to 1845 he published repeatedly new things and old: sonnets on all kinds of subjects, such as those on the *River Duddon*, the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and those on the *Punishment of Death*;—*Memorials* of his Tours in Scotland and on the Continent; classical compositions like *Laodamia* and *Dion*; tales in the romantic fashion, like *The White Doe of Rylstone*, or in the manner of the *Lyrical Ballads*, like *Peter Bell*, written in his earliest time, but not published till 1819. The reception of *Peter Bell* marks the change that had come over public opinion. "It was," says the biographer, "more in request than any of the author's previous publications": it was published in April, and a new edition was wanted in May. Wordsworth had waited, and the world had begun to come round to him. Ridicule and dislike had not ceased. But in minds which loved nature, which loved nobleness, which loved reality, which loved

purity and truth, he had awakened a response of deep and serious sympathy, which placed him, in the judgment of increasing numbers, far above the great poetical rivals round him. It was in vain that *The Edinburgh Review* received *The Excursion* with its insolent, "*This will never do*";—it only showed that the Review had mistaken the set of the tide, and had failed to measure the thoughts and demands of the coming time. Wordsworth's reception at Oxford in 1839 was an outward mark of the change, and of the way in which he had spoken to the hearts of men, and had been at length understood. The enthusiasm which gathered round him was most genuine, and it was wholesome and elevating; it was one of the best influences of our time. But it became undiscriminating. It, not unnaturally, blinded men to defects, and even made them proud of defying the criticism which defects produced.

And there were defects. In his earlier days, at the high tide of his genius and strength, amid works matchless for their power and simplicity and noble beauty, Wordsworth's composition was sometimes fairly open to the criticism,—whether meant for him I know not,—conveyed in the following lines by one who fully measured his greatness:

'Tis a speech
That by a language of familiar lowness

Enhances what of more heroic vein
Is next to follow. But one fault it hath;
It fits too close to life's realities.
In truth to Nature missing truth to Art;
For Art commends not counterparts and copies,
But from our life a nobler life would shape,
Bodies celestial from terrestrial raise,
And teach us not jejunely what we are,
And what we may be, when the Parian block
Yields to the hand of Phidias.
(*A Sicilian Summer*, by Henry Taylor.)

As life went on, he wrote a great deal, and with unequal power and felicity. It may be doubted whether he had the singularly rare capacity for undertaking, what was the chief aim of his life, a long poem—especially a philosophical poem. Strong as he was, he wanted that astonishing strength which carried Milton without flagging through his tremendous task. Wordsworth's power was in bursts; and he wanted to go against the grain of his real aptitudes, and prolong into a continuous strain inspiration which was meant for occasions. In *The Excursion* and *The Prelude* there are passages as magnificent as perhaps poet ever wrote; but they are not specimens of the context in which they are embedded, and which in spite of them, does not carry along with it the reader's honest enjoyment. We read on because we must. In his more ambitious works, such as *The*

Excursion, Wordsworth seldom wants strength, finish, depth, insight. He not seldom wants the spring, the vividness, of his earlier works. There is always dignity, and often majesty; but there is sometimes pompousness. His solid weight and massiveness of thought interest us when we are in the humour for serious work; but it is too easy to find them oppressive, and to complain of him as heavy and wearisome: nay, what is in him less excusable, obscure. And so with his various series of sonnets like those—full of beauty as they are—on the *River Duddon:* he took in too much in his scheme of the series, and there was not always material enough in comparison of the usually fine and careful workmanship. Further, Wordsworth, like other men, had his limitations. That large tracts of human experience and feeling were unvisited by him and were beyond his horizon, is not to be complained of: he deliberately and with high purpose chose to forego all that under the fascination of art might mislead or tempt. But of all poets who ever wrote, Wordsworth made himself most avowedly the subject of his own thinking. In one way this gives special interest and value to his work. But the habit of perpetual self-study, though it may conduce to wisdom, does not always conduce to life or freedom of movement. It spreads a tone of individuality and apparent egotism, which, though

very subtle and undefinable, is yet felt, even in some of his most beautiful compositions. We miss the spirit of "*aloofness*" and self-forgetfulness which, whether spontaneous or the result of the highest art, marks the highest types of poetry. Perhaps it is from this that he so rarely abandoned himself to that spirit of playfulness of which he has given us an example in the *Kitten and falling leaves*. The ideal man with Wordsworth is the hard-headed, frugal, unambitious dalesman of his own hills, with his strong affections, his simple tastes, and his quiet and beautiful home: and this dalesman, built up by communion with nature and by meditation into the poet-philosopher, with his serious faith and his never-failing spring of enjoyment, is himself. But nature has many sides, and lies under many lights; and its measure reaches beyond the measure even of the great seer, with his true and piercing eye, his mighty imagination, and his large and noble heart.

Wordsworth had not, though he thought he had, the power of interpreting his own principles of poetic composition. This had to be done for him by a more philosophical critic, his friend Coleridge. Wordsworth, in his onslaught on the falsehood and unreality of what passed for poetic diction, overstated and mistook. He overstated the poetic possibilities of the speech of common life and of the poor. He

mistook the fripperies of poetic diction for poetic diction itself. Some effects of these exaggerations and mistakes are visible in his composition itself, though they offend less when the lines which tempt to severe criticism are read in their own place and context; but he would have done more wisely to have left them to find their own apology than to have given reasons which seemed paradoxes. In the hot controversy which followed, both disputants made false moves: the Edinburgh reviewers were false in their thrusts, Wordsworth was false in his parry. He was right in protesting against the doctrine that a thing is not poetical because it is not expressed in a certain conventional mintage; he was wrong in denying that there is a mintage of words fit for poetry and unsuitable for ordinary prose. They were utterly wrong in thinking that he was not a most careful and fastidious artist in language; but they had some reason for their objections, and some excuse for their ridicule, when it was laid down without distinguishing or qualifying that there was no difference between the language of prose and poetry, and that the language of poetry was false and bad unless it was what might be spoken in the intercourse of common life. Wordsworth, confident of his side of truth, and stung by the flippancy and ignorant narrowness of his censors, was not the

person to clear up the dispute. Coleridge, understanding and sympathising with what he really meant, never undertook a worthier task than when he brought his singular powers of criticism to bear on it, and helped men to take a more serious and just measure of his friend's greatness. He pointed out firmly and clearly what was untenable in Wordsworth's positions, his ambiguities, his overstatements. He put into more reasonable and comprehensive terms what he knew to be Wordsworth's meaning. He did not shrink from admitting defects, "characteristic defects," in his poetry;—inequality of style, over-care for minute painting of details; disproportion and incongruity between language and feeling, between matter and decoration; "thoughts and images too great for the subject." But then he showed at what a height, in spite of all, he really stood:—his austere purity and perfection of language, the wideness of his range, the freshness of his thought, the unfailing certainty of his eye; his unswerving truth, and, above all, his magnificent gift of imagination, "nearest of all modern writers to Shakspere and Milton, yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own." No more discriminating and no more elevated judgment of Wordsworth's genius is to be found than that which Coleridge inserted in the volume which he called his *Biographia Literaria*.

'SORDELLO'

READERS, and even students, of Mr. Browning, shy at *Sordello*. Mr. Hutton gives it up. Mr. Roden Noel expressly puts it aside, for he cannot make out its constructions. Mrs. Orr, in her handbook, does her best, but plainly feels it an ungrateful task to spend time upon it. And no wonder. Mr. Browning himself calls his poem a "Quixotic attempt." Perplexity, bewilderment, is not the word to express the state of feeling which comes over the mind of the reader when he first opens the book, expecting that language will guide him along the threads of thought to an upshot, more or less distinct, of meaning. His first reading leaves him aghast. Where is he, and what is he among? He is to hear a story told: the story begins, stops for a parenthesis, stops for an address to Shelley, proceeds, breaks off, goes back at a jump thirty years, and we are transported, or rather have to find our way to an entirely different scene and different associations, and so, by hints, and

pictures, and enigmas, to yet another set of circumstances, which follow like slides in a magic lantern. But what is the story all about? We find at last a running commentary at the top of the page; but that is probably not an early discovery, and we go on hoping to find the clue, not outside, but in the poem itself. And yet it is not a thing to put down. We feel that we are in strong hands, and with eyes that have really seen—seen, with keenness, with trouble, with thought—only their owner is not disposed to save us any trouble in making us see what he has seen. It all has the oddness and unexpectedness of a dream, where the things which happen, though they never surprise us, do not happen the least in the common order, and are not connected with the usual associations, familiar in waking life. Yet there come in flashes of sympathy, which illuminate dark depths of the heart, which we thought no one knew or imagined but ourselves. There come tracts of pictured landscape, like the background of some great Umbrian or Venetian painter—background only, with perhaps an unintelligible foreground and action.

> That autumn eve was stilled:
> A last remains of sunset dimly burned
> O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
> By the wind back upon its bearer's hand

In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand
The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
From all Verona cared for the soft sky.

Like Turner's pictures in his later manner—when he is clear, he is very clear: when he is obscure, he is very obscure. And then the language: it is like unpointed Hebrew words, where you have the consonants, and, according as you know the language, put in the vowels. Ellipsis reigns supreme: prepositions and relatives are dispensed with: nominatives and accusatives play hide and seek round verbs: we get lost in the maze of transpositions, and stumble over irritating and obscure parantheses. And then the illustrations and allusions! Sismondi and Milman will give us the history of the time, not quite the same as Mr. Browning's, but something like: the only thing that does not seem arbitrary is the geography. But Mr. Browning is a wide reader, and draws his illustrative materials from sources locked and sealed to us outsiders. How many of us—we feel ourselves in asking the question, to be the "Naddo," the typical critic, on whom Mr. Browning pours such persistent and varied scorn,—but still, how many of us know "Pentapolin of the naked arm?"[1] Why is Cunizza's sphere the "Swooning

[1] I leave this as it stands. But I must confess that Mr. Browning might have expected his readers to know their *Don*

sphere?" Why is Cunizza called Palma? Who is Dularete, and what is 'Saponian strength?" Why is Fomalhaut chosen out of all the stars to be, in the language of a twelfth century lady, the type of a luminous orb? What is the interpretation of the following passages?

> Nature's strict embrace,
> Putting aside the past, shall soon efface
> Its print as well—
> And turn him pure as some forgotten vest,
> Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
> Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,
> Left welter where a trireme let it slip
> I' the sea, and vexed a satrap; so the stain
> O' the world forsakes Sordello, with its pain,
> Its pleasure: how the tinct loosening escapes,
> Cloud after cloud!

Again:

> Heart and brain
> Swelled; he expanded to himself again,
> As some thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail,
> Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail.
> Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth,
> —Suffered remain just as it sprung, to soothe
> The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
> Well in her chilly green-glazed minaret,—
> When rooted up, the sunny day she died,
> And flung into the common court beside
> Its parent tree.

Quixote (i. 11), or at least their *Antiquary* (ii. c. 30) and *St. Ronan's Well*, c. 30 [June 1887].

And if dictionaries help us to names, the names have to serve in a novel history. Alcamo and Nina are names connected with early Italian poetry in Sicily; but Nina the poetess, in Crescimbeni and Sismondi, becomes Nina the poet in Mr. Browning. Ovid will tell us something of Cydippe, but her old lover Acontius is changed into Agathon. And then the words:—"ginglingly," and "writhled," and "bloom-flinders," and "fastuous," and "mollitious," and many more, some no doubt picked out of local usage, but still to outsiders needing a glossary. Is it astonishing if, after wandering blindfold through what seems at first a hopeless labyrinth, some impatient reader should treat *Sordello* as the Italian in Giordano Bruno's story treated his "enigmatic prophet"—"*Fratello, tu non vuoi esser inteso: io non ti voglio intendere—vai con cento diavoli*"—and kicked it, with an indignant malediction, into the dust-heap.

What is there to save *Sordello* from the fate justly due to a σκοτεινὸν ποίημα, like Lycophron's *Cassandra*? It is quite certain that nothing can be done with it, nothing can be made of it, without great attention and some trouble—more trouble than we usually expect to be called upon to give to any book but one of high mathematics. Is it worth while to take this trouble?

That depends. If we want the pleasant and per-

fectly legitimate excitement of a dramatic story, with clearly-drawn characters and the interest of a well-developed plan, we had better keep our time for books where its employment will be more fully rewarded. If there is amusement to be found in *Sordello* it is the amusement of finding out puzzles. But if we are people of a tolerant disposition—if we have realised how we all have our own ways of doing things, and then go on to reflect that a strong and deep and eager mind is very likely to have fits of self-will, and the quaint and perhaps unjustifiable habit of taking its own line in the teeth of what is accepted and usual, we may be tempted, by the obvious signs of the poet's being in earnest, and thinking that he has something worth telling to tell us, into a more patient and inquiring frame of mind. And if we begin to inquire, it is possible that we may find—find something worth our trouble. The reading of *Sordello* is likely to be accompanied, even to the end, by a plentiful running commentary of notes of interrogation, and marks and sounds of even more energetic feeling. But it will be surprising if we do not find a meaning, and a meaning worth writing an elaborate poem for.

Who was Sordello, and what makes Mr. Browning choose him for a subject? Sordello's name would be a forgotten one, with those of other troubadours of

the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but that Dante has chosen that he shall never be forgotten. He was plainly a distinguished person in his time, a cunning craftsman in the choice and use of language; but, if this was all, his name would only rank with a number of others, famous in their time, lost under the cloud of greater successors. He may have been something more than a writer or speaker: he may have been a ruler, though that is doubtful. But we know him, because in the antechamber of Purgatory he was so much to Dante. Through three cantos he is the companion and guide of the two great pilgrims. He is shown to us, as it were, in picture—his solitariness, his lofty port, his melancholy majesty—

> L'ombra tutta in se romita. . . .
>
> Ella non ci diceva alcuna cosa,
> Ma lasciavane gir, solo guardando,
> A guisa di leon quando si posa.

His presence calls forth some of Dante's deepest and most memorable laments over the miseries of Italy, and the responsibilities of her indolent and incapable rulers. He leads his companions to the secret and guarded valley where kings and princes of the earth, who have meant to do their duty, but in the end have not fulfilled their trust, must wait outside of

Purgatory the hour of mercy; where Dante sees their still sadness, and learns their names, and hears their evening hymns. And here we learn Dante's judgment on Sordello himself: he is placed by himself, more self-centred and in guise haughtier than even the rulers and judges in whose company he waits to begin his cleansing; and he is placed among those who had great opportunities and great thoughts—the men of great chances and great failures.

The filling up the story of Sordello is plainly suggested by the fact—we do not say the history, or the character, but the fact and existence—of such a creation of human experience and human purpose as Dante's poem. Dante, the singer, the artist, who could see in the world about him what none other saw, but wielded the spell to make others see what he saw, seemed naturally to belong to that vast and often magnificent company, from Orpheus and Homer downwards, whose business in life seemed art and the perfection of art. Let the world go as it would, let men quarrel and change and suffer as they might, the artist was outside it all: he worked apart, using, it may be, the materials given him by active life; but imagining, inventing, composing, painting, carving, building, singing, because that was his end and calling in life. He told on actual life according to his power, but he did not seek to tell on it. Virgil sang of

Rome indeed, but it was the ideal Rome which he imagined. But Dante, with his artist's eye and artist's strength, was from the beginning, and continued to the end, in the closest contact with the most absorbing interests of human life. His course was shaped by two master influences: for himself, passionate and enduring love: for society, the enthusiasm for righteous government. And these, in a way never known in the world before, were taken up into the poet's nature, combined and fused with it and with each other in indestructible union, and moulded into a character in which we almost forget the poet, and such a poet, in the man. The poet-lover of course was no new thing. The poet-prophet, speaking of truth and sin and doom, had made his voice heard in the cities of Israel, had spoken in solemn tones in the choruses of Greek tragedy. In Dante—a youth dreamed through in the sweetest of Italian homes: a manhood spent in effort, in struggle, in defeat, with keen and fierce and unsparing rivals, in the most stirring and revolutionary of Italian commonwealths: an old age dragged through in wandering and hopeless exile, learning all the shapes and secrets of weakness, of wickedness, of pain to be found in that wild scene which Christendom then presented—in Dante, all this made up the man who saw, and who wrote, the

Divina Commedia. It was no mere magnificent literary production of imaginative genius. It was as real as the man. His life-blood was in it, and with it all that he had seen and felt of the awful and mysterious lot of men: the splendid achievement, the irretrievable fall, the unspeakable prize: the pangs of Francesca and Ugolino, the solemn scene of preparation and self-discipline, the everlasting chant of the Mystic Rose.

The influences which acted on Dante are, in the story, represented as acting on Sordello. Sordello is the child of the same time—the time of awakening perception and longing for the beautiful: the time of awakening power in language and imaginative composition: the time of moral and social anarchy in the cities of Italy—anarchy which neither the Pope nor the Emperor, the supreme representatives of religion and law, could restrain, which they and their factions helped to make more hopeless and more cruel. The idea of a common good, a common government, was still recognised in the municipal order of the cities of Lombardy. The framework and outward form of their institutions were still popular; but from the closer intermeddling of the German Emperor with their affairs, the "tyrant" made his appearance earlier in them than in the Tuscan cities. No such catastrophe had overtaken the cities of the Arno and the

Tiber as the destruction of Milan by Barbarossa. No such incredible and fiendish cruelty had tormented the southern cities as Padua and the cities of the March endured from Ecelin da Romano. This is the world in which Sordello's lot is cast, as Dante's was at Florence: a world more terrible in crime, more terrible in suffering than the worst times then at Florence: a world without the nobler instincts, traditions, aspirations which at Florence were interwoven with the selfishness and bitterness of factious strife, and kept up the ideal and the hope of free citizenship, true justice, and generous patriotism in the famous Tuscan republic. The story, Mr. Browning informs us, is to set before us, with historical scenery more or less accurate, but not necessary to its unfolding, the "development of a soul," in its ideal growth, choice, and fate. As Florence to Dante, so Mantua to Sordello, but only in vague analogy. Sordello went through changes, temptations, sufferings: his aim in life altered, enlarged, absorbed him. But the progress from love and from art, to great public thoughts and wonderful achievements for mankind, which Dante accomplished, Sordello failed in. This, in its various movements and scenes, is the story. Sordello is meant to interest if not attract us. There is beauty, there is nobleness, there is truthfulness, there is resistance to temptation. But so it was: he

mistook the road, tried after it in earnest but missed it, and died.

Mr. Browning has his own way of setting all this before us—abrupt, dislocated, interrupted, incomplete, allusive, broken into by long monologues or meditations. Further, he tells the story, if we may say so, in his shirt-sleeves—with the most pronounced and avowed contempt for mere proprieties as well as for solemnities and pomps: without pretending to help us if we are too slow to catch his humour, or his deep, shy conviction, or his outbursts of amusement: without mercy for us, if we are shocked at the near neighbourhood of the grotesque and the pathetic, the loftiest with the most repulsive and even broad. Is it too much to say that there is sometimes a spirit of mischief in him, and he seems not unwilling to throw us off the trail, or to tempt us into dark places without outlet, leaving us to make out our whereabouts? Lastly, he takes real men and women, who are known to have lived and acted at a certain time —Sordello, and Ecelin the Monk and his ferocious sons, the younger Ecelin and Alberic, and Cunizza his famous daughter—only Mr. Browning chooses that her name is her sister's, Palma[1]—and Ecelin's terrible soldier, Taurello Salinguerra, and Ecelin's

[1] See a list of the family in Rolandinus, ii. 171 (Muratori, vol. viii.)

weird wife Adelaide, who reads the stars, and Azzo of Este, and Richard, Count of Saint Boniface—all only too really actors in a dark and miserable time, of whose doings we may read authentic records in Italian chronicles and annals; but, having taken them and their deeds, he transports them all to his own stage of imagination, and sees them only then as he chooses to think of them and to make them think and speak and do. He does what was a common practice at a certain period of classical literature, and to which our critical days have given, often very unjustly, the name of intentional forgery: the practice of taking up famous or well-known names into the sphere of imagination, and making them speak as it is thought they ought to speak—making them speak what is believed to be true in the spirit though feigned in the letter, like the speeches of generals and statesmen in Thucydides or Livy. Mr. Browning takes great liberties: much greater than our historical dramatists and novelists, when they present a Richard the Second or a Savonarola, perhaps no more than Dante has taken with some of his great names, perhaps with his Sordello and his Cunizza. Sordello, like Hamlet, comes from the poet's "inner consciousness"; the scraps that we do possess about him—Dante's magnificent picture in Purgatory, the scant notices collected in Troubadour histories, or the fuller but more

mythical accounts, like Platina's, Mr. Browning haughtily passes by. He has a Sordello of his own, utterly unlike anything written of him elsewhere, and of him he knows the innermost secret and struggles of his soul; and it is his story, from his birth to his grave, with all its individual features and critical incidents, with his aspirations, and vicissitudes, that he will tell us if we have patience to listen.

But for Dante—so we are to understand—the Sordello of Mr. Browning's imagination would have lived through the ages. Dante is the first of the great poets of the world who wrote with an idea and an end beyond his art itself, equal in its greatness to the compass of man's whole nature; for Lucretius wrote but for a philosophy, Lucan for a political regret. But such an effort was, sooner or later, in the necessity of things, as time, and time marked by the appearance of Christianity, went on. So Mr. Browning imagines that first effort coming before it was adequately fulfilled: it came in the imaginary Sordello, who represents a tendency, who is Dante's forerunner and herald star, because such an attempt must have been stirring in nobler souls, over and above the mere love and craft of poetry, as shown in the imaginary Eglamor, the representative of the Cinos and Guidos of Dante's time, the predecessors of Petrarch. Sordello is supposed to be much more

than the Troubadour known to history. His was the history of a great purpose, though a defeated one. "Gate-vein" of the "heart's blood" of truth and love and mercy "to Lombardy," he was "thy forerunner, Florentine." But Dante absorbed him, "a herald star,"

> Relentless into thy consummate orb
> That scared it from its right to roll along
> A sempiternal path with dance and song.
> Fulfilling its allotted period,
> Serenest of the progeny of God.

But its brightness is not quenched or lost: it is "blent" for ever with Dante's splendours; but,

> Still, what if I approach the august sphere
> Named now with only one name, disentwine
> That undercurrent soft and argentine
> From its fierce mate in the majestic mass,
> Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixed with glass
> In John's transcendent vision,

and tell the story of Sordello, exhibit the "lustre" of his star by itself?

So it pleases the poet to say, for only he knows it. But why—for he does not tell—is this star called, "Serenest of the progeny of God?" Why, "His darling?" We ask, because not even in that realm where the poet disposes all things can we find the reason; unless it be, that Sordello, like Francis,

opened his heart to the cries of the poor crowds. Here is an instance of what Mr. Browning asks from us. Is it part of our trial and discipline as his scholars, that we should read, and not know why? Or else, are we mere blind and common-place critics, such as the personage who plays a prominent part in the poem, the Jongleur, Naddo?

The first portion of the story describes the development of a rich and ambitious poetic nature, its triumphs and failures, its struggles to make its art minister to its pride and selfishness, its profound disappointment and despair, its opening into new life under the inspiration of love—a love fuller and nobler than his own boyish fancy for Palma—Palma's love for him, kindled by her belief in the depth and greatness of his soul, and her longing to live under its power and to behold achievements worthy of it in the world of men and of effort. What shall those achievements be? Then comes a long interlude on the poet's own account. It is an apology—a disclosure for himself—an apology in the guise of banter and skit for letting his own life and soul and purpose appear under the fractures and shortcoming of his poem: a disclosure, a shy, a half-recalled disclosure, of what in his secret heart he has learned is the only object man ought to live for, the one supreme queen and mistress, eclipsing all other charms and tempta-

tions, to whom all passion and all homage by right are due—mankind, in all its mixed glory, in its misery and degradation and pathetic silence and patience, in its poorness and meanness and hopeless suffering, in its endless, immense eternal appeal for pity. The poor, blind, dumb multitudes of mankind whom no man can number, unknown, unheeded, helpless, and without hope, "Earth's immense and trampled multitude," whose troubles, whose sins are beyond all reach—the "sheep having no shepherd" to Divine love, the "many-headed beast" to human scorn—take a poetic shape, battered, worn, with traces of happier possibilities—appeal infinitely to justice, compassion, sympathy, chivalrous manliness and patience, become an object for devotion and passionate enthusiasm:

> Care-bit, erased,
> Broken up beauties ever took my taste
> Supremely; and I love you more, far more,
> Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor.
> Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where
> A whisper came, "Let others seek!—thy care
> Is found, thy life's provision: if thy race
> Should be thy mistress, and into one face
> The many faces crowd."

This mistress his heart goes out to, as Francis longs for and espouses poverty. This great interest is alone worth a strong man's strength and love.

"It is pleasant to be young," to watch the bright girls in the fruit-boats and under the bridges at Venice; but there rises at his side the vision of the human race—"sad, dishevelled ghost"—and it lays a commanding claim on his devotion, paramount to all other. It is for her—under the stress of that high truth, that on the greatest of men, thinker, maker, actor, comes all the greater the imperious demand for his self-dedication to his race, in the ignorance, the wretchedness, the evil, in which it needs his help—that the story of Sordello is continued. What is it but the great truth, that every great life is the echo, strong or faint, of the One great Life of Love, that came to seek and to save that which was lost?

The second portion of the story tells the opening of new thoughts and a new life to Sordello, under the influence of Palma. She has taught him that life needs a worthy object. He opens his eyes and sees, in palpable, individual proof, the miseries of his fellows. But how to remedy it? The great spell of the Middle Ages, the name of Rome, acts upon him. He learns its emptiness. Great factions divide society all round him, with great pretensions, and with great and equal and monstrous crimes. He learns who he is—the long-lost son of the mighty warrior who seems to hold the fate of Italy for a

moment in his hands. Salinguerra would gladly make him head of a power which should crush all the petty tyrannies, and be able to defy Pope and Emperor. But that would be only to continue the reign of force, of wrong, of blood, which has made the earth so miserable for the crowds to whom his life is due. Sordello will have none of that. What is there to do? Mr. Browning does not tell us. Perhaps he might have used Salinguerra's offer, and used it in a new way: perhaps, have been a leader of mankind. Should he, or Ecelin, grasp the place and power of the House of Romano, and be supreme in North Italy? But Sordello dies, and no work is done: nothing is left behind him but a mythical name. The power of Romano passes into the hands of the merciless Ecelin; and Salinguerra—who, we may say in passing, is the one clearly and strongly painted character in the poem; the powerful, unscrupulous, but not unkindly soldier; magnanimous, touchingly honest in his loyalty and content with the second place, smiling, or "immeasurably yawning" at Sordello's transcendental doctrines and long harangues—Salinguerra ends his career, as Italian warriors often did, in the prisons of the jealous police of order-keeping Venice. It was left to a greater soul to find the way which Sordello had failed in, to benefit his fellows, to do something for mankind.

But the teller of his story asks our kind thoughts for him, for the sake of what he died in striving after.

The working out of the first part is comparatively without difficulty. The picture of Sordello's solitary boyhood, passed in a lonely castle and its surrounding woods, near Mantua, an orphan page to an evil and mysterious mistress, with no one to play with and no one to love, left to himself, with nature and what there was in his weird home of art, self-centred, self-pleasing, gradually unfolding his strong, imaginative nature—like a tree gradually bursting out in spring—suggests a contrast with the city life of the boy described in the *Vita Nuova*. In spite of all perplexities of allusion or construction it is a charming picture; but it is as the richness and strangeness of Giorgione to the pure simplicity of line and tint in the Umbrians.

> You can believe
> Sordello foremost in the regal class
> Nature has broadly severed from her mass
> Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
> Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
> For loose fertility; a footfall there
> Suffices to upturn to the warm air
> Half-germinating spices; mere decay
> Produces richer life; and day by day
> New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
> And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.

The unfathomable doctrine of election is stamped upon all nature; and Sordello is one of the elect. The lonely child works its imaginative will on its companions of nature, tree, and flower, and bird, and insect: creates its own wonderful world and its conditions, alters, transforms, tyrannises over it. The boy hears distant sounds of the great human drama, far from him, which he never sees; but he makes one for himself, with names, and persons, and histories: he fights and conquers and rewards and punishes, a despot above law and fear; and he has, too, glimpses of beauty—only glimpses of living beauty —the Palma of his future life; but he can give a life of his own to the beauty of marble in one of the chambers which he haunts.

A vault, see; thick
Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits
Across the buttress suffer light by fits
Upon a marvel in the midst. Nay, stoop—
A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group
Round it,—each side of it, where'er one sees—
Upholds it; shrinking Caryatides
Of just-tinged marble like Eve's lilied flesh
Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh
First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so
They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed;
Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,

Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil
Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,
Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength
Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.
So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,
Like priestesses because of sin impure
Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,
Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs.
And every eve, Sordello's visit begs
Pardon for them : constant as eve he came
To sit beside each in her turn, the same
As one of them, a certain space : and awe
Made a great indistinctness till he saw
Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress chinks,
Gold seven times globed ; surely our maiden shrinks
And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain
Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain
Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt
From off the rosary whereby the crypt
Keeps count of the contritions of its charge ?
Then with a step more light, a heart more large,
He may depart, leave her and every one
To linger out the penance in mute stone.
Ah, but Sordello ? 'Tis the tale I mean
To tell you.

So, unknown to himself, he develops power—power within himself to see, to create, to combine, to colour, for his own delight ; he is his own singer, inexhaustible, untired, and he is his own audience. And out

of this life, left all to itself, as the wild flower from its chance seed in kindly ground, Sordello grows to be a true poet; and discovers it to himself and to others, in a Troubadour contest with the minstrel Eglamor—the mind of real insight and genuine imagination matched against practised but artificial talent.

But there are two classes of souls dowered with the great poetic gift, made to see and feel all that is great and beautiful, and to open the eyes of men to see and feel it too. Both have, it may be, in equal measure, that quick sense to which, as the days and years pass, is revealed in marvellous abundance, the mystery and loveliness of the world.

> Fresh births of beauty wake
> Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
> With every mode of loveliness: then cast
> Inferior idols off their borrowed crown
> Before a coming glory. Up and down
> Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
> To throb the secret forth; a touch divine—
> And the sealed eyeball owns the mystic rod;
> Visibly through his garden walketh God.
> So fare they. Now revert. One character
> Denotes them through the progress and the stir,—
> A need to blend with each external charm,
> Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,—
> In something not themselves; they would belong
> To what they worship—stronger and more strong

Thus prodigally fed—which gathers shape
And feature, soon imprisons past escape
The votary framed to love and to submit
Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,
Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs
A legend ; light had birth ere moons and suns,
Flowing through space a river and alone,
Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
Hither and thither, foundering and blind :
When into each of them rushed light—to find
Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.
Let such forego their just inheritance !
For there's a class that eagerly looks, too,
On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,
Proclaims each new revealment born a twin
With a distinctest consciousness within
Referring still the quality, now first
Revealed, to their own soul—its instinct nursed
In silence, now remembered better, shown
More thoroughly, but not the less their own ;
A dream come true ; the special exercise
Of any special function that implies
The being fair, or good, or wise, or strong,
Dormant within their nature all along—
Whose fault ? So homage, other souls direct
Without, turns inward.

To which of these does Sordello belong ? Alas ! his child's life, his boy's life, has given him nothing to love, nothing to care for but himself : his gift has only created realms to do him homage : it has made

him his own idol, whose claims are absolute and limitless. Except the thrill at Palma's beauty, there is nothing outside him, to sway him, to claim duty and service. He finds himself a poet, saluted as such by the pathetic recognition of his defeated and broken-hearted rival, crowned by the hand of Palma herself. He is spellbound, fascinated by the amazement of unimagined success. A career of intoxicating triumph and fame is before him. He is the favourite of Mantua, applauded, criticised, envied. Strength grows within him, and new and varied demands task it; and the longing grows, too, for larger recognition, for more unqualified and exclusive worship. And Apollo has no reason to complain that his altars want incense—"*tantus eloquentiæ vir existens non solum in poetando, sed quomodolibet loquendo,*" is the judgment handed down by his great successor. He has all he imagined: all he thought due to him. His "desire" is given him; and with it "leanness sent into his soul." The worship asked for to himself ends in satiety, listlessness, despair. After all, he finds that he does not do his best. His conscience, as one who thinks and knows, reproaches him. He knows that there is something truer and deeper in him, than what he has to put forth on the spur of the moment, to keep his character with judges whom he sees through and despises.

Ere he could fix
On aught, in rushed the Mantuans; much they cared
For his perplexity. . . .
Whatever topics they might start
Had to be groped for in his consciousness
Straight, and as straight delivered them by guess.
Only obliged to ask himself, "What was?"
A speedy answer followed; but, alas,
One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
Itself into a period; . . . .
The question Naddo asked,
Had just a lifetime moderately tasked
To answer, Naddo's fashion. More disgust
And more: why move his soul, since move it must
At minute's notice or as good it failed
To move at all? The end was, he retailed
Some ready-made opinion, put to use
This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce
Gestures and tones—at any folly caught
Serving to finish with, nor too much sought
If false or true 't was spoken.

The great dream, that the world was to put its seal on his hungry self-worship, ends in blank disappointment. All this is worked out into the details of a distinct story, with its incidents, scenery, vicissitudes, as if they had come from a chronicle—with its exhibitions of character, feeling, mental activity, as a dramatist interprets and imagines them. Much of this continued illustration of the course and changes of such a soul as Sordello is supposed to be, is, as it

could not fail to be for a poet like Mr. Browning, powerful, subtle, and original. In some parts, it is not easy to follow his meaning: in some, we certainly need an explanatory note. But on the whole, what Sordello's strength and weakness are, what he wants and longs for, where he seeks his happiness and why he misses it, are perfectly intelligible. It is no recondite story. He who turns round God's gifts to his own self-worship will lose what they were meant to bring him, and will find his self-worship a cheat and a delusion.

But the second part is less intelligible. Sordello rises to a higher ideal of life. How this comes about through Palma's influence is told us, but does not appear as clearly as might be wished. But it does come about. He learns that life is not for mere amusement, or pleasure, or glory, or even resigned disappointment; but that to satisfy the standard which he cannot but acknowledge, he must look at the world as it is, not as he may choose to imagine it: he must recognise that he is part of a great brotherhood, a great suffering brotherhood: that he owes it infinite obligations of patient sympathy, duty, help; and that only a life led under the consciousness of these obligations can satisfy him and make him happy. Imagination, the poet's gift, even more than sight, has made him understand this: it is a gift for

which he is responsible. But the story passes on in Mr. Browning's hands into a pathetic tragedy. Sordello sees his mission, but somehow fails to fulfil it: resists the temptation that would divert him from it, resists it in its gross sense, and yet does not see to what account the occasion might be turned. The talent, one or five, is not put to wrong use, but is not used, because he fails to find, though he wishes, how to help mankind. This is his fault; and so, because "what he should have been, could be, and was not" —because he missed something which "he wished should go to him, not he to it"—therefore Dante justly finds him, not among the lost, but among the greatly negligent, almost the "slothful servant," "*servus piger*"; among the well-intentioned leaders of mankind who had trifled over their tasks. Dante did that which bound him for ever to his fellows; which made all Italians henceforth brethren; which gave eyes to see to all generations of mankind; which lifted their souls from the sin and soil of time to the eternal light. Sordello has remained a name—a name added to a few ballads.

But what Mr. Browning's telling does not make plain is, wherein was the failure. Doubtless, Sordello is beaten by his half-heartedness: he is, and he knows he is, too weak for a great work. But where and how does this show itself? What is it that he ought

to have done, might have done, and did not? His temptation, it would seem, was when, after Salinguerra had recognised him as his long-lost son, after he had listened, first with amusement and then with impatient scorn, to Sordello's pleadings for the poor and miserable multitudes, and finally had been cowed and overawed by Sordello's gathering earnestness and passion, Salinguerra had offered him the armed leadership of Lombardy, perhaps of Italy. There it was for him to take, if he would. But to take it, was to take it with its small chances of justice and mercy, with all its certainties—witness Salinguerra himself—of violence and cruelty: it was to continue that which had appalled his soul with its ghastly terrors. That, surely, was not what he was called to; and he resisted the temptation. But he had only strength to refuse it, and no more: he had not heart or will to see what it led to; and refusing it, in Mr. Browning's story, he dies: his work left undone in despair, his divine work unfinished, while the poor hermit-bee, which had been working all the day, was able to accomplish what God had given it to do.

> By this, the hermit-bee has stopped
> His day's toil at Goito: the new-cropped
> Dead vine-leaf answers, now 'tis eve, he bit,
> Twirled so, and filed all day: *the mansion's fit*
> *God counselled for.* As easy guess the word

That passed betwixt them, and become the third
To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax
Him with one fault—so, no remembrance racks
Of the stone maidens and the font of stone
He, creeping through the crevice leaves alone.
Alas, my friend, alas Sordello, whom
Anon they laid within that old font tomb,
And, yet again, alas.

But then, what had he to do? Was he too late for everything? Was it the Nemesis of power wasted long ago? Was the opportunity gone for being among the masters of thought, or the masters of action, or the masters, like St. Francis, of sympathy? Could he have made a nobler use of what Salinguerra offered, for the real good of Italy, and had he not the heart? Or, is his death, which is told with such strange reticence, meant to leave us in darkness, with the suggestion that love may accomplish in another life what a poor fellow-mortal failed to accomplish here?

Che cima di giudizio non s'avvalla,
Perchè foco d'amor compia in un punto,
Ciò che dee satisfar chi qui si stalla.

Sordello, it must always be remembered, has wasted half his life, and, as he says, Nature does not give a second life to mend the first. The man who has dawdled away his first years of power in what is frivolous and selfish, cannot start on the same

level with the man who from the first has been in earnest. When, at last, Sordello comes to be in earnest, he has already lost much of his time of preparation for a true life's work. He has missed his chance of knowing its true conditions. So in his very earnestness he is continually jarring against these conditions. He sees great things done in the world—Rome, for instance, or human civilisation—and he wants to do great things. But he mistakes the way they are done—not all at once, not by some great stroke, but as nature develops the tree, or as the coral-reef is built up. "A man can do but a man's portion, the last of each series of workmen."

And then a low voice wound into his heart:
"Sordello!" (Low as some old Pythoness
Conceding to a Lydian King's distress
The cause of his long error—one mistake
Of her past oracle) "Sordello, wake!
God has conceded two sights to a man—
One, of men's whole work, Time's completed plan,
The other, of the minute's work, man's first
Step to the plan's completeness: what's dispersed
Save hope of that supreme step which, descried
Earliest, was meant still to remain untried
Only to give you heart to take your own
Step, and there stay—leaving the rest alone?
Where is the vanity? Why count as one
The first step, with the last step? What is gone
Except Rome's aery magnificence,

That last step you'd take first ?—an evidence
You were God : be man now ! Let those glances fall !
The basis, the beginning step of all,
Which proves you just a man—is that gone too ?
Pity to disconcert one versed as you
In fate's ill-nature ! but its full extent
Eludes Sordello, even : the veil rent,
Read the black writing—that collective man
Outstrips the individual ! Who began
The acknowledged greatnesses ? Ay, your own art
Shall serve us : put the poet's mimes apart—
Close with the poet's self, and lo, a dim
Yet too plain form divides itself from him !
Alcamo's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,
Woven into the echoes left erewhile
By Nina, one soft web of song : no more
Turning his name, then, flower-like o'er and o'er !
An elder poet in the younger's place ;
Nina's the strength, but Alcamo's the grace :
Each neutralizes each then ! Search your fill ;
You get no whole and perfect Poet—still
New Ninas, Alcamos, till time's mid-night
Shrouds all—or better say, the shutting light
Of a forgotten yesterday."

The "multitude " of his imagination is a very different thing from the concrete multitudes whose various items meet him : the ideal Rome falls to pieces in the presence of the real Rome ; and he has not power to harmonise the two. How should he help the great "cause," not of Guelf or Ghibelline,

but of mankind? He might help it by his gift as a poet—he might help it by hand and action. Should he trust his great gift of access to the souls of men? Should he throw heart and life into its exercise? or should he take the judge's badge, the soldier's sceptre, and rival Charlemagne and Hildebrand? Ah, there is no time now for the first: he saw through the temptation of the last, and refused to "oppress the world." He sees no other way. And so he failed.

Who thus, by fortune ordering events,
Passed with posterity, to all intents,
For just the god he never could become.
As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
In praise of him: while what he should have been,
Could be, and was not—the one step too mean
For him to take,—we suffer at this day
Because of: Ecelin had pushed away
Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take
That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake
He did much—but Sordello's chance was gone.
Thus, had Sordello dared that step alone,
Apollo had been compassed—*'twas a fit*
He wished should go to him, not he to it
—As one content to merely be supposed
Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed
Really at home—one who was chiefly glad
To have achieved the few real deeds he had,
Because that way assured they were not worth
Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—

A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes
Never itself, itself. Had he embraced
Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit
And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot
All he was anxious to appear but scarce
Solicitous to be. A sorry farce
Such life is, after all!

There is a subtle Scotch proverb, "Good reason and part cause." There was "good reason" why he should shrink from taking the place which Salinguerra wanted him to take, and this was "part cause" why he did nothing more. But it was only "part cause"; the rest of the "cause" was his disinclination to think out something better and more troublesome. He failed, because wishes and will are not the same. He who began with requiring everything to bow to his will, ended by being unable to will the thing he would. He can save himself from being what he ought not to be—what Salinguerra would have made him, the heir of the power of the house of Romano and of its selfishness and violence: further, the supplanter of the rightful heirs, whom Salinguerra proposed to betray—that step was "too mean for him to take;" though it would have been better for the world if he had taken it, and kept out Ecelin and Alberic. But he did nothing more. They proved

> Wherever's will
> To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill
> Or good.

He would not do the ill, but cared not to do the good from

> His strange disbelief that aught was ever to be done

If the good had come to him of itself he would gladly have taken it. But he had not the will to imagine it, to seek it; and so his noble and beautiful nature, with all its grand possibilities, sank into uselessness and into forgetfuluess.

Failed, as so many have failed, as so few have not failed. But, as Mr. Browning teaches us, there are different kinds of failure. That there may be earthly falling short and imperfection, which is much greater and more hopeful than great earthly achievement, is, indeed, one of his deepest convictions and favourite lessons. It is developed with great power, and greater clearness than here, in "Paracelsus": growing out of the strange mixture, in the highest natures, of limitation and hope—hope boundless, limitations impassable, puzzling, humbling. Besides failures which seem absolute and final, there are failures that carry away with them noble qualities and capacities full of promise, though they have been beaten here—failures which are greater even in

disaster than the smooth perfect successes with which so many are content. Is not something to be put to the limitations of our short, mortal life? to the disparate conditions of soul and body—an eternal soul with a body of time, bringing what belongs to the eternal into the mould of the temporary, and bursting the vessel too weak to receive it?

> Now, of the present sphere we call
> Life, are conditions; take but this among
> Many; the body was to be so long
> Youthful, no longer: but, since no control
> Tied to that body's purposes his soul,
> She chose to understand the body's trade
> More than the body's self—had fain conveyed
> Her boundless to the body's bounded lot.
> Hence, the soul permanent, the body not,—
> Scarce the one minute for enjoying here,—
> The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
> Run o'er its capabilities and wring
> A joy thence, she held worth experiencing:
> Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,
> The minute gone, the body's power let go
> Apportioned to that joy's acquirement! Broke
> Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke,—
> From the volcano's vapour-flag, winds hoist
> Black o'er the spread of sea,—down to the moist
> Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,
> Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again—
> The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great
> To the soul's absoluteness. Meditate

Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord
And the whole music it was framed afford,—
The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck
One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck.

So, while Mr. Browning sorrowfully throws up his Sordello's earthly conquests, his attempt to bind himself to his kind and do some great thing for it, his life wasted by half-heartedness and self-pleasing, he does not part without hope for his gentleness, his quick sympathies, his readiness to let in the love of his fellows, his nobler ideals, his refusal to exchange them for lower ones. Sordello falls short of the heroic, of the saintly, of that perfection which in its own conscious imperfection rises higher and higher after the divine and the unattainable. He falls short of this as much as he is above the narrow completeness represented by Eglamor, which accomplishes what it aims at because it aims but low; which is not troubled, distracted, hindered by the mystery of wider and deeper thoughts; which may be simple and sincere and contented in its limitations and lowliness; which may be stupid and ignorant self-satisfaction, but which at any rate is incapable of the troubles and the hopes of greatness. Sordello, like so many of us, is between the two. He has not made much of things here, though he had the eye to see and the soul to aspire. But may there not be a future for him still?

For did not Dante meet with Sordello at the foot of the steeps of the Mount of Cleansing—having, it may be, long to wait, but still there, where no more change could harm him—waiting amid "majestic pains," as after such an experience he might well wait—in still, stern communion with himself till his time should come?

The following lines seem to sum up the main drift of *Sordello.* They are clouded by an inexcusable obscurity of language, allusion, and entangled thought. Yet they present in dim and imperfect outline a great and profound idea, struggling to disclose itself. In their force, and in their defects —in what they do, and in what they do not effect, they are characteristic of the whole attempt.

So much was plain then, proper in the past:
To be complete for, satisfy the whole
Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul
Exceeded, so was incomplete for, each
Single sphere—Time. But does our knowledge reach
No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke
But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,
Its loves and hates, as now when death lets soar
Sordello, self-sufficient as before
Though during the mere space that shall elapse
'Twixt his enthralment in new bonds, perhaps?
Must life be ever just escaped, which should
Have been enjoyed?—nay, might have been and would,

Each purpose ordered right—the soul's no whit
Beyond the body's purpose under it—
Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,
And that sky-space of water, ray for ray
And star for star, one richness where they mixed
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
Tumultuary splendours folded in
To die—would soul, proportioned thus, begin
Exciting discontent, or surelier quell
The body if, aspiring, it rebel?
But how so order life? Still brutalize
The soul, the sad world's way, with muffled eyes
To all that was before, all that shall be
After this sphere—and every quality
Save some sole and immutable Great and Good
And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood
To follow? Never may some soul see All
—The Great Before and After, and the Small
Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
And take the single course prescribed before,
As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?
But where descry the Love that shall select
That course? Here is a soul whom, to affect,
Nature has plied with all her means, from trees
And flowers e'en to the Multitude! and these,
Decides he save or no? One word to end!
Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend
And speak for you. Of a Power above you still
Which, utterly incomprehensible,
Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man—

What need! And of—none the minutest duct
To that out-nature, nought that would instruct
And so let rivalry begin to live—
But of a power its representative
Who, being for authority the same,
Communication different, should claim
A course, the first chose and this last revealed—
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—
What utter need!

THE END

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